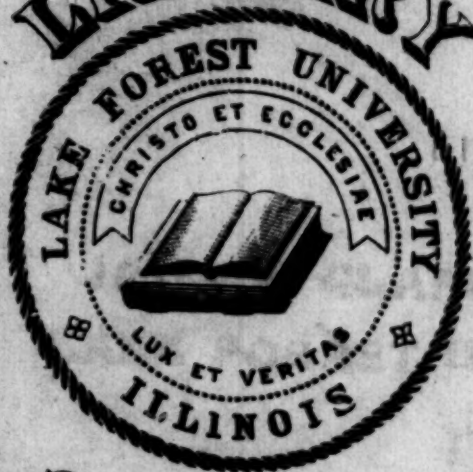


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THE
WEDDING RING;
OR,
HISTORY
OF
MISS SIDNEY.

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In a Series of LETTERS.

In THREE VOLUMES.

V O L. III.

L O N D O N:

Printed for F. NOBLE, near MIDDLE ROW, HOL-
BORN; and J. NOBLE, in St. MARTIN'S COURT,
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MDCCLXXIX.

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MDCCLXXIX.



30-5-75

T H E
W E D D I N G R I N G ;
O R,
H I S T O R Y
O F
M I S S S I D N E Y.

Patrick O'NEALE, to Captain M'DANIEL.

London.

JOY! joy! my brother in iniquity.

—I have at last, after the most elaborate search, discovered by meer accident, the hiding-place of my adorable

VOL. III.

B

girl,

2 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

girl, and hope in one week more, to have her entirely in my possession. I was driving through Richmond a few days since, on a party of pleasure, and accidentally saw her sitting in a window in a handsome lodging.—I am convinced I am not mistaken.—She saw me not. I sent my man afterwards with a feigned message to know if the mistress of it had any apartments to let; and if a Miss Drummond did not lodge there. I received for answer, she had no spare apartment, and that a young lady lodged there whose name was *Seymour*, not Drummond.—Seymour! So the pretty fool, for fear of discovery, thought it requisite to change her name.—Cunning! but take heed, my fair one,

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 3

one, that I will most severely punish thee for all the plague thy elopement has cost me; for by the eternal vengeance I here swear, she shall not now escape me.—I have my revenge now to gratify, as well as another passion; to both which I shall sacrifice her.—I shall want thy help, and another or two of thy myrmidons from Bridges-Street—from our old haunt:—my scheme is to carry her absolutely off.—but meet me to-morrow at the Devil Tavern, and then I will discover my whole plot.—Night, or rather deep midnight, must be the time. The old woman, where she lodges, I can easily send out of the way—a favourite son in London may want to see her: but

4 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

there is a plaguy circumstance which I must set all my wits to work to conquer.---A curfed, formal, sober fellow lodges in the house, I find, that, without he is removed out of the way, it will be impossible to attack the house in the manner I intend to do;---though I shall swear, point blank, that she is my wedded wife, and has most scandalously eloped from me, her husband. This you all must likewise swear. But the worst part of all is, this queer fellow happens to be the *real* Sir Harry Beaumont, whose fictitious character I have sometime made free with. This is unlucky, that this very man should be in the very same house;---and it may be attended with some very disagreeable

able circumstances, as I have more than once forged his name and title.—This impertinent fellow must, therefore, by some means, be got out of the house for a few days, till *all* is over.—Hold,—let me think.—I have it.—He has a fond, doating old mother and sister.—I have formed my scheme.—I have enquired his whole history.—I must, I find, act with the utmost caution and circumspection.—A man of large fortune I am told, and has lately taken the title.—He may be a formidable plague.—A cursed, sanctified, prim, formal prig, I find.—Heavens! to lodge as he does in the same house with such a divine girl as Lucy Sidney, and knows not, perhaps, there is

6 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

a female lodger in the house!—The first thing I do, is always to enquire if there is a *girl* under the same roof, and whether she is guarded by a maiden aunt, or watchful duenna.---I then play my cards accordingly, and am sure to carry my point.

A chariot and six must be ready in the lane by a stated hour.---But all these matters I will settle at the Devil Tavern to-morrow; where, I charge you, not to fail meeting me.---I have many little things to settle before I put this grand scheme in execution, which I shall look upon as my masterpiece.---She is *such* a girl, M'Daniel! ---But thou shalt see her.---I will first
carry

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 7

carry her into the country to a snug retreat I shall provide;---you see I have business enough on my hands:----besides, I must set my wits to work, how to get this old woman, where my charmer lodges, out of the way, as well as that cursed, sanctified fellow, my namesake.---Plague take him!---I fear he may prove troublesome to me; as a little imitation of *bands* (vulgarly called by an ugly word) as well as taking his *title* upon me, may turn out not very favourably to my wishes.---But I will not meet trouble:---a pistol may do his business any time of an evening, that he can be met alone. I should mind no more shooting such a fellow through the head, than I should one of my dogs.

8 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

No more of him at present.---Lucy Sidney is the word.---My plots shall be as deeply laid as the very *prince* of darkness himself can dictate: but I lose time---adieu, till to-morrow.---As long as I can keep my neck out of a halter, I remain,

Thy friend, and brother in iniquity,

P. O'NEALE.



Mr.

Mr. HARLEY * to CHARLES STANLEY, Esq.

Richmond.

YOUR last letter, my excellent friend, does not give me all the pleasure I expected from it, as you do not tell me your health is amended.— You see I fulfil my promise of writing;—but, alas! the picture is not to be found that should have accompanied my letter. Who the *thief* can be, is indeed above my comprehension:—for what

* It is judged most convenient at present to superscribe Mr. Harley's letter, with his former name, to prevent confusion.

10 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

is wonderful, the setting, which contains the diamonds round it, is left, and the picture itself *only* taken:—this is strange!—but to subjects more material.

I am just returned from paying the last sad office of attending to her grave one of the best of women;—who, five days ago, expired in my arms.—O my friend! death surely loses its sting, when the resigned sufferer can look back on a life of strict piety, attended with every virtue which can exalt the human soul.—A few moments before her death, she took a most affectionate leave of all about her:—to me it was most particularly so.

“ Adieu,

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 11

“ Adieu, my Henry! she faintly cried;—I am going apace:—the painful journey is now at an end:—but (with a smile) can this be dying?—I feel no pain,---no agony.”—Then attempting to raise my hand to her dying lips, she sunk in my arms, and expired without even a groan.—I stood some moments gazing on the breathless form.—What an awful preacher is death to the contemplative mind!—I could not help exclaiming, — “ How private thy journey!—how short thy passage!—how glorious thy end!—Many, in life, may have been more conspicuous, many more ambitious of applause, but not *one* so innocent.—Eternal mercy take her spotless soul!—May I die the death of

12 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

the righteous, and may my last end be like hers !

“ When ev’n at last the solemn hour shall come,

“ And wing my mystic flight to future worlds.”

May I resign my dying breath, with humble hope, that I am entering on scenes of endless bliss, the reward of a well-spent, though short probation, in this state of trial and perplexity. I lament the death of the above worthy woman, not only as she was the beloved, only sister to my excellent father, but really as a tender parent to myself, as she had for several years the care of my infancy, and my early part of life was entirely under her management, during
my

my mother's attendance on my father, for some years, to the south of France. —I early embibed from this good woman those sentiments of honour and virtue by which I steer my life :—the tear of gratitude, therefore, as well as affection, is, and ever will be due to her memory*.

Adieu, my friend, for a few hours, as my servant informs me my horses are waiting. My spirits are so sunk, my heart in such constant anxiety for this unaccountable fair fugitive, that I must

* The Editor hopes, the very striking contrast of sentiment and character in this best of men, and the worst of libertines, will have their proper effect in the mind of the reader.

try

14 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

try what the air, and the enchanting prospects of Richmond-Hill, will do to revive me:—but no scenes in England will, I fear, avail:—you will perhaps see me much sooner than you imagine, as I shall instantly leave the kingdom, when I have settled all my affairs.



Oh, Stanley! I am all rapture, and amazement!—What cannot the secret, wonder-working hand of heaven, in its own good time, by ways which mock our feeble foresight, bring to pass?—She is—my friend—she—the enchanting Miss Seymour, is, it seems, an inhabitant of this very house.—O
gracious

gracious heaven, is it possible?---Have I once more found her?---And ye guardian angels who preside over distressed innocence, have you been careful of your charge? Yes, heaven has heard my prayers, and I am happy*.----“ But how?----(you cry)----where, or when, was this amazing discovery?---“ Have a moment’s patience, and I will tell you all.----I have seen her,----gazed on her matchless form;---she is now---now in her apartment, on the same floor with mine!----And did I lose her at Kenning-

* How different the virtuous joy of this worthy man, from the sensual savage triumph, expressed by his vile rival, on the similar circumstance of discovering Miss Sidney!

ton,

16 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

ton, but to enhance the happiness of meeting her thus unexpectedly, when I was even lost to hope?---But all this while your curiosity is on the rack ; take, then, the following, short particulars.

When I returned from my morning's airing, in passing through a kind of anti-chamber which leads to my apartment, I saw a door half open, belonging to a room which, by its situation, I imagined must command a very extensive prospect of the neighbouring hill. I went to this door, which I had never before observed, and stood a moment, but heard no person in the chamber: all was so silent, I was at once convinced no person whatever was there. A

strong

strong curiosity seized me of entering it. The window, I saw, was directly opposite the door; so that one moment conveyed me to it. I however stopped again:---I listened on my entering; but saw, nor heard, no human being. I had heard of no person lodging in the house besides myself, and I firmly believed no one was there, but that the door might be accidentally opened by one of the servants in the house.---Accordingly I walked in, and directed my steps to the window, where, for a few moments, I stood to admire a very beautiful prospect of---“tufted groves, and shining rills;”---but, on turning my head round, my whole attention was roused, on seeing under a kind of recess,

18 THE WEDDING RING ; OR,

recess, on the opposite side of the room, a small white bed, the curtains of which were open, so that I could plainly discover a woman was laid on the bed. I observed, by the transient view I had of her, that she was well dressed.---My confusion was great, when I reflected, at that moment, on my intruding into the apartment of another person, and with hasty steps I was making the best of my way out of the room again, when, in passing by the bed, I observed the lady to be in a most sweet and profound sleep.---But, oh! my Stanley, think of my amazement, when there appeared to my astonished view, the enchanting form and lovely features of Miss Seymour!---They were indeed too deeply

deeply engraven on my heart, to suffer me to be, even for one moment, mistaken in the person.---My wonder was so great, that, starting back, I audibly exclaimed,---“ Good God!--can this be possible?”---My exclamation, however, did not awake the fair sleeper:---her eyes were closed in sleep.---But how exquisitely beautiful did she appear!--From her attitude I imagined she had flung herself carelessly on the bed, and that, from her forehead being bound round with a handkerchief, she had been disordered with a headache. I stood for some minutes lost in equal delight and amazement.---How enchanting her attitude! one cheek rested on her lovely hand; the other, flushed

flushed with the warmth of the season, exhibited a view beautiful to excess:—her other arm, the finest in the world, lay carelessly extended on the bed.—Heavens! with what rapture did I gaze!—and could have gazed for ever!—Fearful of alarming her, I hardly drew my breath: I cast my eyes on a small table near her bed, where stood the poor remains of a frugal breakfast;—a dry crust,—and other marks of the distressed state of this charming woman.—On a chair adjoining lay some new work—shirts, handkerchiefs, &c.—That moment it occurred to me, it was most probable to be the very same, which good Mrs. Morley (my aunt) had ordered, some time before, the
landlady

landlady of this house to get done for me.—O, my friend, think of my feelings, when I found the mistress of my soul had been employed for her daily bread in working for me!—But language cannot do justice to my heart on this affecting circumstance. I was the more convinced of this, when I plainly saw the initials of my name, H. B. which her dear hands had perhaps been just marking.—Again I turned my raptured eyes to the bed, on which still lay in a deep and profound sleep, the most beautiful woman on earth. I would have given worlds to have imprinted a kiss on that hand, which I was convinced had been employed in my service; but a delicate fear, which arose from

22 THE WEDDING RING; or,
from the apprehension of alarming her,
in such circumstances, checked my
rapture *. ---- I approached, however,
nearer the bed, to take a last look,
when, on stooping softly, I observed on
her enchanting bosom, which was half
uncovered, not

“ A cross,
“ Which Jews might kiss, and Infidels adore.”

But—(think of my rapture when I be-
held it) the very identical little picture
I have been in so much search after, tied

* The refined, the delicate behaviour of this
worthy man, may perhaps be little understood
by the rakish libertine, or fashionable fine gen-
tleman of this gay age.

round

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 23

round her lovely neck, and hanging on her breast.—In an extacy of joy and wonder, I could hardly forbear clasping her to my heart;—but my respect, and the fear of alarming her delicacy, prevented me.—So convincing a proof that I was not indifferent to her, filled me with a transport beyond the power of language to express. The charming *thief* was now before me, and, without the smallest degree of vanity, it was not difficult to discover, why she committed the theft.—The diamonds, you see, she despised; the bare little portrait was all she coveted.—A thousand little circumstances that moment rushed into my mind, relative to her behaviour, when I visited her in the town

of

24 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

of ———: all which convinced me, as I stood fondly gazing on the enchanting object before me, that she entertained sentiments in my favour of the tenderest nature. Nothing should have hindered me *then*, as I before told you, of declaring mine to her, but the belief I lay under of her being a married woman.—I now hope—I think she is not so.—But it was high time for me to leave the apartment of this lovely woman; as, had any of the family come in, *appearances* would have been greatly to her prejudice. For *her* sake, therefore, I hastily quitted a scene which was too dangerous for even a stoic to behold.—This sacrifice I made to her delicacy:—and I will own to you, that

I had

I had then experienced a pleasure, in recollection far superior to the most sensual gratification that even so much beauty could have given me:—though on quitting her I could hardly forbear exclaiming,

“ O Virtue ! Virtue ! as thy joys excel, .

“ Thy trials are transcendent ; the gross
“ world,

“ Knows not the bliss or misery of either.”

I have been walking this hour in my apartment, lost in joy, amazement, and delight. I seem to tread in air : every inanimate thing around me, partakes, methinks, of my ineffable transport. O, Charles, she loves me !—But how she

26 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

got this picture is the astonishing circumstance! — I am now determined, at all events, to have an interview. If I find her hand disengaged—she is—she shall be mine.—I am raised, my friend, from the very lowest depth of despondency, to the highest pitch of earthly felicity.

—————“ How bountiful is Heaven!

“ Depressing often, but to raise us more.

“ Let never those despair who follow

“ Virtue.”

Whilst I have been for these last three happy hours meditating in what manner I shall introduce myself to this divine Miss Seymour, a letter is this moment

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 27

moment brought me, which greatly excites my attention, — and indeed surprise: as I had never heard a single word of the affair before:—but I rejoice exceedingly at the event.—It is a letter from my good mother, relative to an offer of marriage (a very advantageous one, I find) my beloved sister has just had, and she begs my advice and immediate presence on the occasion. You have heard me talk an hour together of the amiable qualities of Fanny Harley; and I shall heartily rejoice to see the good girl happily disposed of to a worthy man. But the letter my mother writes on this subject I enclose for your perusal (as I know how much you have mine, and my fa-

28 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
mily's interest at heart) and you may,
if you please, read it here.

THE LETTER.

Harley-House.

My dear Harry,

I KNOW this will give you equal
surprize and pleasure:—but must first
beg you not to be alarmed at my not
being able to write this myself, as I
have had, for some days past, a gouty
complaint in my right hand; so am
obliged to make my housekeeper my
secretary

secretary at present.—This letter, my dear son, is to inform you of a very interesting affair, which, as you are the most affectionate of brothers to the best girl in the world, I could not delay a moment informing you of.—Know then, that Fanny has had an offer from Lord B——, who has lately purchased a fine seat in this county very near us. He saw her, I find, at the races, and is most wonderfully smitten. Your sister has confessed to me he is by no means indifferent to her.—As his character and morals (which to me are the chief inducements, for I cannot dispense with *morals* in a husband) are unexceptionable, I want only your concurrence in this very momentous affair.

30 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

I must, in short, beg you to come to us as soon as you possibly can set out, after your receiving this.—I must have a long consultation with you about her fortune, his settlements, &c. in fine, about a million of things which cannot be transacted without a personal interview. I want to have your opinion of this man.—Your sister, indeed, will take no step in the affair till she has consulted you;—who in all cases of emergency have (by your excellent advice) stood in the place of her dear father. And as you are the most kind brother that, I believe, ever existed, I know you will not delay a minute to satisfy our impatience to see you.—We shall expect you by Thursday evening

at

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 31

at farthest.—I rejoice to hear you have recovered your health. Adieu till Thursday.---Believe me ever

Your most affectionate mother,

REBECCA HARLEY.

P. S. Fanny sends you her kindest love.---You will excuse her not writing, I know, on this subject.---I long to know your opinion of this man.

I will suppose you have read the foregoing letter; and you see the absolute necessity there is of my setting out for Harley House immediately; that is,

C 4

to-morrow.

32 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

to-morrow.---Dear girl! I shall be excessively happy to see her united for life, to so worthy a young nobleman as Lord B——. There are not many such in this age.---On my return, which will be in the space of a very few days, I am determined to have an interview with this most amiable young woman Miss Seymour;----and if I find her, such as I hope she is, I will, my friend, make her mine for ever.---Transporting thought!---but at present I must fly on the wings of duty and paternal affection to my excellent mother, whose smallest desire has ever been to me an absolute command. I will, however, before I set out on my journey, enclose a twenty pound bank note in a blank
cover

cover, directed to Miss Seymour, and send it by the penny-post, that she may not feel the present distresses of absolute want.---O, my Charles! what do I suffer, in the painful reflection that she has been employed in earning her daily bread!---that those lovely hands, formed only for the most elegant employments of genteel life, have been laboriously busied in my service!---heavens! I cannot bear the thought.---But adieu for the present.----I will not, however, close my letter here, for as I know you are anxious for the happiness of me and my family, I will finish this letter at Harley-House; as I shall wish to give you my opinion of this offer of marriage my sister has had; and what

34 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

I think of this Lord B——.---A feeling heart is a blessing one would not wish to be without; and yet it is productive of the most painful sensations: mine, at this moment, though in the midst of all my transport, cannot help sensibly feeling for the distress of the good woman of this house, whose only son (a fine promising youth) is dying in London, it seems, of a putrid fever, and begs to see her in his last moments.---O Stanley! with what difficulty shall I tear myself from this house, though but for three days, which contains the dearest treasure I have on earth!---I long to throw myself at her feet, to offer my person, hand, and fortune, to her acceptance. And how shall I be able to
pass

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 35

pass by the door of her apartment, without venting my heart, which is overflowing with tenderness, joy, and amazement!----But my duty to the best of parents must be preferred to every other consideration.----I go then:--and may every good angel preserve Miss Seymour till I return. Adieu.



Friday, Harley-House.

I DATE again to say, I am exceedingly surprized at the very different situation of affairs here from what I expected.---You will, my friend, be

C 6

equally

36 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

equally amazed with myself, when I inform you, my mother knows nothing of the letter which brought me here. Astonishing!—the author of it, whoever it is, can bode me no good,—and I have been racking my brain in vain, to think who it can be, as I have not, to my knowledge, an enemy in the world;—at least, as I have never injured any man, I am at a loss to know the writer of this letter.—But I will lead in order to this mysterious affair.

On my arrival at this good old mansion, I was conducted to the apartment of my mother, whom I found sitting by herself reading *Sherlock on Death*.—She lifted up her hands, in the utmost surprise,

surprize, at seeing me enter.—“ This, my Harry, is kind indeed !”—I tenderly enquired after her health, particularly of the gouty complaint mentioned in her letter.—She stared,—and told me she had not been better for many years.—“ But, said I, much surprized, where is Fanny ?—Is Lord B—— now here ?”—My good mother either did not hear me, or understand not my last question ;—but replied,—“ Why, poor Fanny is quite ill with a bad cold, and is confined to her apartment :—she will rejoice to see you.”—“ But, dear Madam, said I, how long has Lord B—— made his addresses ?”—My mother looked surprized, and began some other subject.—I told her I must hasten to
my

38 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
my beloved sister, which I instantly did.
I found the dear girl in bed.—Her joy,
on seeing me, almost overcame her spirits.—She held out her hand.—“ My
brother ! — this unexpected happiness
will make me well at once.—“ Come,
Fanny, said I, smiling, there is another
person in the world, the sight of whom
would, perhaps, restore you sooner to
health than, as Laertes says in Hamlet,

“ Could forty thousand brothers do,

“ With all their quantity of love.”

Come, tell me all.—I am impatient to
hear the most minute particulars. —
Where, when, and how, did this affair
begin? — I will not injure my dear

Fanny

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 39

Fanny so much as to imagine a *title*, or the grandeur of this alliance, a coach and six, with the noble seat at S——, can have any weight with you, my dear, as it too often has with most of your sex:—it is the *mind* alone which should be the object of your choice. Beware then, my sister, that you are not blinded by the common views of the world. Indeed you have no occasion:—your own fortune is large;—and as to my ever marrying, (continued I, with a sigh, Miss Seymour's image that moment before me) it is a matter of great uncertainty, though I have the highest opinion of the state.—Lord B——, I know, has a great and improving estate, and his character is unexceptionable:

—to

40 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

—to see you united for life with such
a ——.” I might have continued my
very grave, and wise harangue, for an
hour, if my sister, with the utmost as-
tonishment, had not flung back her
curtains, and with the greatest surprize
in her voice and manner, said, “ Good
“ God! my dear Harry, are you out
“ of your senses?—Lord B——! fine
“ feat at S——!— and blinded by a
“ title!—What, for heaven’s sake can
“ you mean?” “ Come, come, Fanny,
“ (said I) do not plead ignorance of
“ my meaning. ----The generality of
“ your sex on these occasions, feign
“ not to know any thing of the mat-
“ ter;----but I thought *you* had been
“ greatly above this little affectation,—

“ The

“ The letter my mother sent me on
“ this important occasion—.” “ For
“ heaven’s sake (she answered) what
“ important occasion? Is my brother,
“ I repeat, out of his senses?”—My
mother, that instant, entering the room,
I produced the letter to their and my
own very great astonishment.—My poor,
good mother, was so extremely shock-
ed, that I had much ado to pacify her:
she was terrified to death, lest some hid-
den enemy had laid a plot for my life,
by a vile forged letter. I assured her,
I had no enmity to any man living;
nor knew I one who had any to me. I
told her to silence her fears, that I ra-
ther looked on it as a little frolic among
some of my young acquaintance in
town;

town;---and yet I knew none but what are greatly above the mean little wit of, what is called, a *bum*.---You may imagine we can talk of nothing else:—my mother and sister both assure me, they never saw Lord B——, and that he has no feat in this county, or ever had.---You must think my astonishment is great. To-morrow I return again to Richmond:---for, ah! my friend, my whole soul is in perpetual longings for an interview with the lovely woman there.---Heaven shield her, during my absence, from danger!---I have a kind of presention I may again lose her.---I have a sadness about my heart I cannot account for.---I am, as you know, the least superstitious of any man breathing;

ing; yet, in a broken slumber I had this morning, methought I was walking with the enchanting mistress of my soul in shades of bliss and aromatic sweetness:---whilst heavenly forms sung to their lutes our spotless loves:---when, on a sudden, I know not how she was, methought, at once by some being of an unusual appearance, snatched from my enraptured sight, and borne shrieking,

“ Thro’ forests vast, and long

“ Untravel’d heaths, with desolation brown,

“ In night and tempest wrapt.”

There she stood succourless and sad,
and with extended arms implored my
aid:

44 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

aid:---but all in vain: she was snatched from my view, and hurried through immense regions of gloomy darkness, whilst pale fleeting shadows of guilty ghosts were yelling round.---I awoke in an agony, and cannot yet shake off my mind the apprehension that *she* (there is no other) may be in some kind of danger;---though what I cannot devise.---Mrs. Smith too, the good woman of the house at Richmond, is absent. She too, now I recollect, was summoned away, as well as myself, very suddenly. ---What am I to think of all this?

I am just now setting out for Richmond. My poor mother begs me to take two of her servants to join to my
atten-

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 45

attendants on the road, as she apprehends I am to be way-laid, robbed and murdered.---Fanny too, is weeping for my safety. I laugh at their fears, and am perfectly easy on that head. If Miss Seymour be but safe, all is well.--- But I fly to her.---Conjectures are all useless, and only retard my departure.

“ Thought drives on thought, on passions, pas-

“ sions roll,

“ Her smiles alone, can calm my troubled

“ soul.”

Ever yours, my dear Charles,

Sincerely,

H. B.

The

The same to the same.

Richmond.

O MY friend, distraction must be my portion!---She is lost!---carried off with the most brutal force, by a set of villains, who the first night of my departure, beset the house for that purpose.---I am half frantic!---O my prophetic fears!---Where now is the poor distressed sufferer?----Yes, my Stanley, her screams, her cries, were ~~regardless~~ by the vile wretches who bore her off; and at midnight a chariot and

six

fix was at the door, into which she was forcibly hurried. But a few of the shocking particulars I will relate as well as my distracted thoughts will permit.

With a speed which out-stripped the winds, I arrived here, a few hours ago. The first person I saw, was a poor, faithful, servant maid, who looks after the house in her mistress's absence. "O, Sir, have you heard the most dreadful, shocking story?---She is robbed! murdered!---Not all her screams could stop the villains.---And what could I, a poor weak woman do, to save her from five such fellows as beset the house?"

"For

48 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

“For heaven’s sake (interrupted I) what do you mean, or of whom are you speaking?—of your mistress?”—“Though, alas! my prophetic fears too plainly told me whom she meant.

“No, Sir, not my mistress; but that sweet good young gentlewoman, who worked for her living, who lodged here in the little blue room.—She is gone,—lost,—killed by this time.—Her husband, indeed!—no—no—he was not her husband.—And me too they bound:—see here the print of the cords: I laid in fits all this morning.—And my poor mistress, where is she? She was trapp’d away out of the house:—her son was not ill; for he was seen but yesterday

yesterday at the Custom-House in perfect health."

"How (said I, with a voice scarcely articulate) how did this happen?"

"Why, Sir, the night after you was gone, Jenny, the cook, went to see her friends, and the chambermaid went to London with my mistress.—I was to wait upon young Madam up stairs:—young Madam I call her, for though she was reduced in the world to work, as one may say, for her living, yet I always said, and so did my poor mistress,—Susan, she used to say, I am very sure the young gentlewoman in the blue room is come of a grand family:—

50 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

not that she had one bit of pride in her,---not she.---Ah, she is a sweet-tempered, kind, good, ———, that is, she was; for she is murdered long before now, I dare say.---Well, Sir, to make short of my sad story, I was not gone to bed:---it was near twelve at night:---she was finishing some work---a shirt I think it was:---yes, it was a shirt, that my mistress got for her to make.---(O, Charles, what did I feel!) Well, Sir, to be brief. I told her to ring her bell if she wanted me;---I went down stairs, and my brother had but just left me;---he is a sea-faring man, but has been sadly used about some prize-money; he has been three times in the East

East Indies; but the last voyage was rather ——."

"Come, said I, do not tell me about your brother's affairs, but go on with your account of the poor young lady."

"Aye, Sir, you may well pity her, indeed:—but to go on.—I was just going to put out the fire, when all of a sudden I heard a carriage drive up swiftly to the door. I thought you was returned; and hearing, as I thought, your servant knock at the door, I at once opened it; when, O sad, and dreadful to relate, in rushed five men. Two flew round upon me, and stuffed a handkerchief into my mouth, and tied me

with a cord to the table in the passage : the rest went up stairs. I could hear Miss Seymour scream enough to move a stone : whilst the villains, one in particular, called out, " Have I got you, Madam, at last ?—Bear her off,—bear her off ; —draw up the carriage."—" Wicked, abominable monster (I heard poor Miss Seymour say) unhand me this moment." " Never, never, shall you escape from your husband again, I heard one of the villains say.—She, poor wretch, screaming all the time.—" Help, help, is there no help for a poor lost creature ?"—I thought for my share, I should have gone quite distracted to hear her cries, and not have it in my power to give her the least assistance,

ance, tied as I was." — (Think, my friend, of my agony to hear this soul-piercing account.) "Well, Sir, down stairs she was brought, though she clung by the banisters at every step they took. The tallest of the men had her in his arms, she struggling with all her might:—but, alas-a-day, what was her strength to such a villain's!—She 'spied me in the passage bound, by the light of the candle. "O Susan! Susan! she cried, tell Mrs. ———." "*That she shan't,*" said one of the wicked men behind:—and took up one of the candlesticks and threw it at me.—I was then all in darkness.—They opened the door after they had stopped poor Miss Seymour's mouth with her handker-

54 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
chief.—The tallest of them swore bitterly, and ordered the carriage to draw up. “Put her in, said he,—drive off as if the devil drove you:—make the best of your way to the great western road.—Drive, ye devils.”—That was the last shocking word I heard; for in one moment they were all out of hearing, and poor me left in the dismal plight I mentioned.—They had left the street door on the jar, and about eight in the morning, the baker calling with bread, found me in this frightful condition. He immediately unbound me, and soon after the neighbours came in, and I lay sometime in fits. I am now a little better, but my poor mistress I have not yet heard of.—This is all, Sir,

I know

I know of this shocking affair, and to be sure, that poor, good, young creature, is before now, ruined and undone, if not murdered."

Here Susan ceased her horrid recital. I instantly resolved to set out in immediate pursuit after these abandoned villains, and to rescue the poor miserable sufferer. I shall take four men with me, all armed with pistols, and am determined to find, and to save her, or die in the attempt. My whole soul is on the wing: the words they dropped of taking the western great road, may be of some service:—for that I shall pursue:—and not leave a public house unsearched, till I have found

56 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

her. But, ah! where, and to what perils is she now exposed! Thou glory of the sex!

“ O dearer, justly dearer, far than ever,

“ Quick let me find thee, pour into thy bosom,

“ My full, full soul, with tenderness o’er-
“ charg’d,

“ With fondest love, with gratitude and won-
“ der!”

Villains!—who knows what she may not now be suffering!—This is, I see, whoever he be, the vile wretch on whose account she has secluded herself from the world. But no more—every moment is an age of pain.

“ ’Till

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 57

" 'Till she be found, my breast is tumult all,

" And can obey no settled course of reason.—

" I see her still, I feel her powerful image."

With what inevitable misery is she encompassed !

" Ten thousand horrors croud

" Into the wild fantastic eye of love."

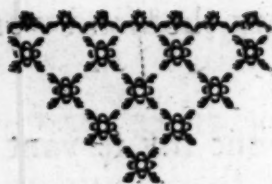
I would not bear this rack another day for twenty thousand worlds.

This moment my servant enters with a letter from my Stanley.—Yes,—it is his writing.—I snatch a few hasty moments to read it, though nothing else on earth should detain me here,—my horses, carriage, and servants, all

58 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

in waiting. The honest fellows are so attached to their master, that they one and all declare they will, to their last drop of blood, stand to my service.—

But now for your letter.



CHARLES

CHARLES STANLEY, *Esq.* to Sir HARRY
BEAUMONT.

Paris.

YOU see, my dear Harley, I am yet got no farther than Paris, where I have unexpectedly met with a most agreeable English family (of whom more presently) and with whom I set out for Spa, in a very few days. But I suspend every thing relating to *self*; I forego the pleasure of informing you, for a few moments, the rapturous account I could give you of my own affairs; of my amended health, &c. to

60 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

congratulate you on the felicity of your present situation, which perhaps (as is often the case) you are not acquainted with.—Harley, you are a happy fellow. ---What! the finest girl in England in love with you!---of birth, fortune, and accomplishments, equal to a virtue and understanding which few women can boast!---In short, a Lucy Sidney! “A Lucy Sidney? (you ask) what do you mean Charles? Is not the unfortunate lovely woman I adore, distressed, poor, and an object of mere charity, and you talk of birth and fortune?”---Yes, my friend, she is an heiress to a great estate.---But to unriddle this mystery (for the secret, wonder-working hand of heaven, seems to decree that I am to have

have the exquisite pleasure of leading you through this dark labyrinth of doubts and uncertainty, concerning what and who, is the lady in question) know then, my friend, that she (Miss Seymour, as you call her) is no imprudent or infamous young creature, whom guilt of any kind has driven from her parents, and who secretes herself from the world, through unworthy motives of shame or folly; but the most amiable young creature that ever existed, the most noble-minded of women.---Alas! how little able are we to judge of appearances! No guilty creature it is, who has thus excited your admiration, but the most delicate, the most virtuous of her sex; who, with the greatest heroic

roic fortitude, and by the watchful hand of Providence, whose chiefest care is suffering innocence, has been enabled to fly from the vilest of human beings, who, though married to her mother, had the daring impudence to solicit her love, and to form the most infamous attempt on her virtue. Nothing but flight,---absolute flight, could save her. With unparalleled generosity (lest she should render her wretched mother still more miserable, had she confessed the real cause of her departure) she fled, preferring absolute poverty to infamy, and the most obscure wretched retreat which her forlorn, helpless condition, must necessarily inflict, to the pomp and grandeur to which she had all her life.

life been accustomed.---She is no guilty wretch, obliged to *skulk* in holes and corners, but is Miss *Sidney*, the most elegant of women;—bred to a noble estate, of which she is the undoubted heiress, in the west of England.—Poor, distressed innocence! what has she not suffered in fears of pursuit, from the most infamous of wretches, her vile persecutor!—who, to add to his other wickedness, had before taken upon him your name and title,—Sir Harry Beaumont.—Forgeries under that *title*, he has been frequently it seems guilty of. I fear *title* is, indeed, too often a screen for the worst actions. You will wonder how I came by all this secret intelligence, which I communicate to you,
with

with the quickest dispatch imaginable; and will ask, what invifible power has imparted thefe truths to your friend? —Indeed, I may fay an angel has; but it is an earthly one;—one of the moft amiable of women that ever exifted is my informer of the above particulars. I have, my friend, moft wonderful things to relate concerning myfelf;—but fo ardent, fo extreme was my defire of being the meffenger of good news to you, in clearing up the conduct (which you feemed to *doubt*) of this moft excellent young lady, Mifs Sidney, that *friendfhip* got the better of all other confiderations. And now I have fet *your* heart at reft, I will open *mine*.

Know

Know then, that the dear informer of the above interesting account, is—
O, my Harley, the charming woman for whom my soul, for these last two years of my life, has suffered such constant anxiety. Her rigid uncle, of whom you have often heard me complain (though an honest man I believe in other respects) never acquainted his lovely niece, Harriet Woodley, of my passion, which he promised to do. You know how long I have languished for an interview: you also know my health has been evidently affected with the dreadful suspense under which I have so long laboured:—but how mysterious are the ways of heaven!—and how wonderfully, in its own good time, does

66 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

does it bring about our utmost wishes, by secret steps, which mock our feeble foresight! By the most unexpected chance, and lucky incident, I have happened to lodge in the very same house, at Paris, with the divine Harriet Woodley, her uncle, &c. who are all going to the German Spa.

You, my Harley, are a lover, and can feel for my transport, on being introduced to Mr. Woodley, and talking the affair of my heart over. After excusing his conduct, on account of his ill state of health, he gave me his entire consent to address his lovely ward, with every encouragement my fondest love could wish. Of this privilege,

you

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 67

you may be sure, I instantly availed myself: and lodging in the same house, have had numberless happy opportunities of disclosing the sincerest passion which ever actuated the heart of man: and I have the extatic happiness of finding I am not indifferent to this most charming woman: the qualities of whose mind are equal to her fine person, of which you have heard me run on by the hour together. She permits me to attend her to every public place:—she sings sooner at my request than that of any other person:—in short, my friend, I am perfectly happy in the sure prospect of soon being united to her, by the most indissoluble bands. You will ask, how the subject of Miss Sidney came upon

upon the carpet.—I will tell you.—In one of my *tête-à-têtes* with Miss Woodley, I having on some occasion mentioned your name, I observed she started at the name of Harley. She asked me many questions relative to your affection for the fair lady you mentioned in your letters, and I having informed her of the *peculiarity* of your case, for *lovers* can only tell of *love*; she told me she believed she knew the lady who had made this entire conquest of a heart hitherto indifferent to the sex; and in the utmost confidence imparted to me Miss Sidney's affecting story; concealing, through delicacy for her friend, that her regard for you was reciprocal; but

but, as she read me a few paragraphs from her inimitable letters to herself, I easily gathered, notwithstanding the blushes of my sweet Harriet, and her endeavouring to conceal them, that Miss Sidney loves you to distraction. The care Miss Woodley took to conceal this secret of her friend, only made it more apparent: but, ah! my Har-ley, you will be equally surprized and grieved to find, that the fair fugitive escaped from her lodging, at Kensington, merely on being told, a Sir Harry Beaumont had lodgings in the same house; and her not knowing you had changed your name, and taken your title, has occasioned this unlucky mistake;

take; this kind of wild goose chase.—

She fled from you, believing you were the man of all others she has most reason to detest. I am sure there are plots enough in both your adventures to furnish any modern play whatever.

—But, come, now you are once more under the same roof again (for I find, by your last letter, that you are removed to Richmond, and by what I can gather from Miss Sidney's letter to her friend, she, it is, who has *played* the *thief*, and stolen the picture you so much lament; I say, from laying these circumstances together, I find you are both under the same roof) I hope you will, therefore, either have an interview,

or

or come to such a good understanding, of who each other is in reality, that she may not fly again from the man in the world she most loves:—in the mean time, heaven keep her from any further plots and stratagems of this vile wretch who has taken your title. His real name, I find, is O'Neal; a most notorious gambler; that he has run out a handsome fortune in practising, to excess, every vice of which human nature can be guilty; that he is intrepid, hardened in all sorts of wickedness, and that he has half a dozen infamous wretches, as bad as himself, to aid and assist him in his villainy. Sweet innocence! angelic Miss Sidney! what must
have

have been your terrors, your sufferings! —You will easily conceive her passing for a married woman, and taking the name of *Johnson*, was all an innocent stratagem to conceal her real situation; as is likewise her calling herself by the name of Seymour. I dispatch a courier with this to Dover, as I too well know the misery of suspense, not to forward to you the most early intelligence of this most interesting matter. May you, my excellent friend, as soon be in possession of this lovely woman, as I shall be, I firmly believe, in a short time, of her charming companion; for now her uncle, from an unaccountable, though common oddity of humour in
old

HISTORY OF Miss SIDNEY. 73

old people, as strongly espouses my
cause, as he before neglected it. Write,
and may all happiness attend you.

Ever yours,

C. STANLEY.



VOL. III.

E

Mr.

Mr. HARLEY in Continuation.

A Million of thanks to my Stanley for his most kind information.—Yes, my friend, I knew,—I saw,—(but language is insufficient to express what I feel on this occasion) that she was innocent.—Wretch that I was, ever to doubt!—But O, I have lost her!—lost her for ever!—Ye just and heavenly powers, am I not punished, as I deserve to be, for judging uncharitably of distressed innocence; to suffer cold dark suspicion, with its vile train of mistrusts, doubts, and unjust surmises

to

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 75

to poison my mind, and shut out the noble principles of candour and generosity!—O my adorable Miss Sidney! Can you forgive me?—It is impossible.—I have wronged the innocent,—I have wronged the highest of all human characters, *distressed virtue*.

“ She was the image of all perfect goodness,

“ A beam from heaven, that glow'd with every
“ virtue.”

I am now robbed of all that could afford me joy or sweetness, and I deserve my fate,

“ To let my poor, mean-hearted love, one
“ moment,

“ To cowerd prudence stoop; who made it

“ not

E 2

“ The

76 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

“ The first undoubting action of my life,
“ To snatch thee to my breast, and there to
“ shield thee,
“ Thy helpless bosom, from a ruffian's fury !
“ O agony,—O grief,—O the fell stings of
“ late,—of vain repentance !”

Stanley, if I have lost her, I cannot live:—I see, I plainly see the whole affair:—I see her delicate distress:—her matchless virtue in every step.—And was it, most angelic sweetness, from *me* you fled, when I would have given worlds to have preserved you from violation? —But I fly to her aid. May every heavenly power assist me !

Mijb

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 77

Miss SIDNEY to Miss WOODLEY.

*From a miserable Cottage on
Bagshot Heath.*

O MY Harriet! how shall I begin my wretched tale? Where find expressions sufficiently adequate to convey to you the sad—sad state of your poor unhappy friend, who, after all her vigilance, her watchful care, is once more in the hands of the most infamous villain that ever existed?—wretched,—wretched Lucy Sidney!—Alas! my friend, my peaceful abode at Richmond, was, on Tuesday night, beset by

78 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

five villains, some of whom entered my chamber; whilst the vilest of men, Sir Harry Beaumont, bound me with the most cruel outrage, and hurried me, screaming, to his carriage *, — with a handkerchief stopped in my mouth, and muffled in his cloak, he placed himself by my side, ordering to be drove to the great western road with the utmost speed; the hardened abandoned villain, swearing the most blasphemous

* Here Miss Sidney gives a particular account of those wicked wretches binding the maid servant; of Mrs. Smith being sent to attend her son; of the gentleman who lodged in the house being also absent; all which, the reader being already acquainted with, it is needless to repeat.

oaths,

HISTORY of Miss SIDNEY. 79

oaths, I should not now escape him.—
His behaviour was, however, to me *de-*
cent;—I mean, as to personal liberties,
though I am threatened with the worst,
—with the most brutal *force*, which I
doubt not he will soon put into execu-
tion.—He is going, I find, to convey
me to a lone house he has taken, on this
infamous account, some where in the
New Forest.—O wretched,—miserable,
that I am!—On Tuesday night, as I
have told you, was the dreadful time of
my departure from Richmond.—Till
peep of day, the horses were drove with
the utmost speed;—when the vile
wretch was seized (thanks to heaven)
with a violent pleuritic pain in his side,
which obliged him to stop the carriage

80 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

in the middle of Bagshot Heath, and call his infamous associates to his aid. One of whom I saw, through his disguise, was the very wretch who perforated, at the fatal wedding at Ash Park, the *attorney* who came from London—I screamed a-fresh.

A kind of consultation was now held by this wicked band, in which it was agreed to lay by the middle of each day, till they reached the New Forest, and only travel (for fear of observation) by night, or day dawn:—the abominable Sir Harry, now declared his agonies from his side were so violent he must stop at the next house. A miserable kind of alehouse, no better than the meanest

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 81

meanest cottage, then presenting itself, he alighted, and I was dragged out, and carried up, muffled in a cloak, to a wretched apartment, whilst he ordered a bed to be got ready for himself, in which, thank heaven, he now is.— He told the woman of the house, in my hearing, I was his wife; but that, having eloped with another man, he was obliged to use force to detain me with him, as she saw.

I am now shut into a miserable hole, which the woman calls her best chamber: and, though this is Thursday morning, I have not tasted a drop of, even water, or a mouthful of bread, since I left Richmond; so fearful I am, lest

82 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

Some shocking *potion*, or intoxicating *mixture*, may be given me in my drink or food. The woman of the house has brought me tea, with other things, for my sustenance; but, as it is by the order of that infamous villain, I will touch nothing.—Death, I hope, will soon relieve me.—I am unusually faint.

I was just now much affected. A little child, of three years old, who was left by chance in my room, held out his bread to me, saying at the same time, “You shall—you shall—poor Madam, eat it.”—O, Harriet!—I cannot go on.—Hunger forced me to take it.—I swallowed it greedily;—persuaded, that the little innocent, who
offered

offered it, could mean no harm, and that I could run no hazard by tasting of his food.—It seemed, methought, as if heaven had pointed the child out as the instrument of supporting me.—Gracious God! (I exclaimed at the time I raised to my famished lips the homely crust) I thank thee; that by the means of this poor babe, I am enabled to support my present being, which, whatever be my lot, shall be devoted to thee.

I have not, you may believe, closed my eyes, or been prevailed on, though much intreated by the poor woman of the house, to lay down on a bed which is in the room. The vile wretch is in

84 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

his bed, surrounded by his wicked associates.—I must be brief.—My poor hands are so miserably galled, by the cord the shocking wretch bound round them, that it is with the utmost difficulty I can hold my pen.—Harassed to death, and shuddering at the expectation of my approaching fate, I am nearly in a state of distraction.

“ Is there no pitying power

“ Which sees into the depth of my distress?”

Two days have I now remained in this dreadful state. The wicked man is, I find by the woman of the house, too ill to pursue his journey. His execrations, and blasphemy for the disappointment

pointment of his horrid designs, though but for this short time, as I hear them even from his chamber, fill me with a terror which no words can paint. The woman of the house has just been with me with a basin of tea, which I have absolutely refused tasting.—One cannot, my Harriet, be too cautious, in my dreadful state, of every thing, and of every body.—This woman, I doubt not, is in his interest.

Come, Madam, (she has just been saying) you need not take *on* so,—if so be you cannot fancy his honour, God bless him poor gentleman, like unto another, yet as he is your wedded husband, as I understand, why, you must
make

86 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

make the best of it. His honour will not be able to travel to-day, I am sure. —Well, he is a sweet, charming, young, handsome gentleman as ever the sun shone on; and spends away his money like a great fine gentleman as he is. Well, it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good.” “Peace, good woman, I replied, let me hear no more.”

“I have done, Madam, only do not grieve so.—Consider, you have here every thing you can desire:—and here are books on this shelf that will entertain you;—and a sweet delightful prospect from your window:—and shall I send up my little Tommy to you, as you seem to like the child?—Consider,
you

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 87

you have a good house over your head, which thousands want;—and there is a merciful God over us all.”

I bid her depart, and send up her little boy:—but the last words of this poor wretch sunk deep into my mind. “Yes, you gracious powers of mercy, I am, indeed, under a shelter which thousands want, and under *thy care*, maker omnipotent, who, in thy own good time, wilt deliver me from this impending evil, or give me strength and fortitude to subdue it. And, O my God! direct some means for my relief!—some heavenly angel for my guard, in this trying crisis!

I found

88 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

I found my mind strengthened, after this short address to the Almighty Father of Light and Life; and the sweet boy that moment entering the room, with his little frock filled with apples, and a crust of bread, I had again an opportunity of satisfying my hunger.—He held the apples to me with the sweet innocence of that age.—I greedily devoured some, and put the rest in my pocket; blessing, as I ate them, that God, who, through this child, had so unexpectedly sent me this support.—I then went to the window to view the prospect the poor woman had so much extolled: but, alas! saw nothing, but the most black and dreary appearance of Bagshot Heath, and its barren hills,
with

with which this dismal, lone spot is surrounded.—The books too on the shelf, she mentioned, I just opened, hoping to find a bible; but what she called books of entertainment, were only Culpepper's Art of Midwifry, an ~~old~~ Dispensatory; with the Farrier's Guide, and Directions for preserving the Game.

I have just slipped half a crown into the dirty little pocket of my friend Tommy, softly exclaiming, "O gracious God! enable me, at some future period (if it be thy will to prolong this wretched existence of mine) to provide for the support and maintenance of

of this poor baby, who has so wonderfully, by thy means, supported me from perishing by absolute hunger.—The apples were indeed a most seasonable relief, assuaging my thirst, as well as satisfying my hunger.—I scribble on, my sweet friend, to save my mind from distraction:—and the woman of the house has promised to send this by the post, which passes every day by this door to London.

O heavens! What do I hear!—the vile wretch and his associates ordering the carriage to be got instantly ready! yes, the woman of the house has just been here to inform me, the infamous
man

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 91

man is better, and preparing to depart.
—O God!—I hear his shocking voice
on the stairs:—he is coming to me!—
Heaven support me!—I can no more;
but shall put a wafer in this.—Adieu,—
perhaps for ever—and O, pray for your
wretched

LUCY SIDNEY.



Mr.

Mr. HARLEY to CHARLES STANLEY, Esq.

New Inn, near —.

TRansporting tidings of joy have I
to acquaint my dear friend!—
Think (for here all language must fail)
of my unbounded rapture:—my extatic
happiness, when I informed you that I
have found her—(my heavenly angel!)
rescued her from the vilest wretch that
ever existed;—have conveyed her safe
to Harley House, where she now is, in
the arms of my excellent mother!—O,
Stanley!—were it possible for me to
doubt, which I never did, of a *particular*
Provi-

Providence, this late miraculous event, in which so plainly appeared the hand of God, would strike me dumb with conviction.

But your anxiety for my happiness will, I know, make you impatient to hear the particulars of this *gallant* adventure.—Should you ever have dreamed of my becoming a knight-errant?—All things being in readiness for this exploit, I set out in a chariot and six, the instant I had finished my last letter to you.—Four men, armed with pistols and blunderbusses, led the way.—The hint I heard of the vile man taking the great western road, made me determine to get into that, as soon as possible.

94 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
sible.—My faithful fellow, Tomkins,
enquired at every inn on the road, if
such a party as we were in pursuit of,
had been seen to pass; but no tidings
could we hear of them. This was dis-
couraging to my distracted soul; but
I began to conjecture, the infamous vil-
lain might lay by, for fear of observa-
tion in the day, and travel only by
night; and I was perfectly right in
my guess; for, on the very first even-
ing, as we were now in the midst of the
dreary solitude of Bagshot Heath, at a
miserable ale-house or cottage (a wretch-
ed sign-post hung out of a *blue* lion) I
thought I saw, the day being not quite
closed in, a chariot and six standing at
the door. This uncommon appearance,

at

at such a house, made me at once conclude my search was at an end. I instantly observed my servant Tomkins to hold up his hand to me, as if he was convinced we were right, when I ordered my carriage to stop;—but, gracious heaven! what was my emotion, when I saw the angelic Miss Sidney dragged between two men, with an intent to force her into the chariot at the door!—A man's cloak was wrapped round her, which, in her struggling, had now fallen from her shoulders; her lovely hair half dishevelled, with a handkerchief stopped in her charming mouth. My rage was so redoubled at this soul-piercing sight, that I instantly leaped from my carriage, and flying upon the tallest

tallest of the men, who I imagined from his dress to be the infamous man I pursued;—I cried, “Thou villain, abandoned villain, unhand the lady this moment, or the next shall lay you dead at my feet.—He started:—and quitting immediately his lovely burthen, I advanced to her, when she instantly knew me, and screaming cried, “O, Mr. Harley!”—and fainted in my arms.—“Seize that infamous scoundrel, said I to my men, which they did, whilst I recover this lady”—I bore her to my chariot—She opened her languid eyes.—“O, heaven, is it, can it be, Mr. Harley?”—“Yes, my angelic Miss Sidney, it is your Harley, who will save you,—die for you,—defeat this monster

fter

ster of iniquity, or perish in the attempt."——Here I clasped her for a moment to my fond breast, and whispered to her soul my extatic rapture. She softly cried, "O save your precious life:—do not put it to the hazard by encountering with a ruffian."——But this was no time for my raptures, or her acknowledgements.

I ordered Tomkins to guard the lady, whilst I flew to secure this arch villain. He was now preparing to draw his sword; and with a loud voice, thought to intimidate me, by a volley of shocking execrations; swearing, that all the devils in hell should never separate his wife from him."——"Your wife!

—thou monster of wickedness—(cried I, almost breathless with rage) what! the daughter of the woman you shamefully betrayed into marriage, your wife! —He pretended to rant.—“Why, who art thou?”—I here dragged him behind the chariot, as I chose not the tender heart of my angel should be terrified at this shocking scene.—“Who am I? —(replied I, in accents equally enraged)—one that will make you tremble.—Sir Harry Beaumont, I am, thou vile impostor, who has dared to forge my name, and title.—Your impious forgeries are all discovered.”

Here, such is the force of truth, I observed for one moment, he started with

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 99

with *guilt*;—but, impudent as the most hardened course of villany could make him, he once more, with the most blasphemous execrations, swore he would never relinquish the lady.—“That, said I, shall soon be proved; as well as your base, your vile artifices.”—Here, with the most audacious insolence he drew his sword, and before I could draw mine, so as to be in a posture of defence, he, in the most cowardly and treacherous manner, wounded me in the left arm, taking the most ungenerous advantage.—“Thou wretched poltroon (cried I, grappling with him) was it not for Miss Sidney, whose wrongs cry to heaven for redress, I would scorn to contaminate my sword on a guilty wretch;

who deserves no better a fate than dying by a halter."—Here we made a furious pass at each other; and, after a scuffle, I, having much the advantage of him in strength and agility, (for though he is young, he is I find a shattered diseased wretch) got him down; where coward-like he lay.—I had him now entirely at my mercy, and was going to plunge the steel into his wicked heart, when heaven seemed to stop my hand, and the still small voice of conscience told me, "Rash man, forbear: leave his crimes to God to punish. Send not his guilty soul, with all his crimes about him, into everlasting perdition.—O spare him to make his peace with God."—

"Powers

“ Powers of mercy (I cried) in this awful moment, direct me for the best.”

—My drawn sword held over him—

“ Know, said I, thou impious wretch, this moment is thy last.”—He then, trembling, begged for mercy, and promised that he never more would molest Miss Sidney.—“ You see, said I, thy wretched life is in my hands;”—but, after a pause, “ take it, and employ the remainder of it in begging pardon of thy God.”—Here I left him on the ground; and, returning to my lovely angel, told her all was happily over.

“ Alas! said she, faintly screaming,”
you bleed!—Ah me! What! was it in

my defence?"—"Only a slight scratch (said I) all—all is happily over."—I then sprung into my chariot, and, whilst my unhurt arm supported this lovely woman, ordered to be drove with the utmost speed to the best inn in the next town—my servants following. They had had, it seems, a long scuffle with the other servants; two of whom they had left on the ground, the other three being gone to the aid of their wicked master.

O, Stanley! imagine the blissful state of a soul in the mansions of love and joy, and you may have some faint conceptions of my enraptured feelings.—It is not in nature to describe a scene so
exqui-

exquisitely affecting;—it may be felt, but no tongue, no pen, can do it justice by description.—Here the soft eloquence of a Rousseau, who so feelingly has described the tender passion;—the sweetness of a Rowe's numbers;—the heart-felt, refined language, of the great master of the human passions, Richardson, must fail;—fall infinitely short.—You, my friend, who are a *lover*, can feel for me;—can figure to your heart my rapture, my unbounded joy.—I pressed the enchanting Miss Sidney to my heart, my eyes lifted to heaven with gratitude,—whilst she, reclining her lovely head on my breast (without knowing in her sweet confusion she did so) shed a shower of tears on my bosom.—I

kissed away the precious drops, whilst my cheek was wetted with her tears.---

O, Charles! I am convinced there are moments, even in this life, worth purchasing with worlds!--so unaccountable is the human heart, that though we had both ten thousand things to say, and to explain, yet we said but little:---our joy was too great for utterance.

We were now driving by moon-light to the next town, which was only a few miles distant:---the moon was indeed *walking* in all its brightness;---whilst my happiness was equal to Lorenzo's in the Merchant of Venice, where he says,

“ How

“ How sweet the moon-light sleeps upon that

“ bank !

——“ In such a night as this,

“ When the sweet wind did gently kiss the

“ trees,

“ And they did make no noise,”—&c.

——“ Whilst all the floor of heaven

“ Was thick inlay'd with patterns of bright

“ gold,”

every object in nature seemed to add to the enchanting scene.

We now arrived at an exceeding good inn, where I had sent my servants on before, to order beds and an elegant supper; repose and refreshment being absolutely necessary, for the harrassed spirits of my fair charge, who was

near fainting with fatigue, and want of food.

O, Charles! what an affecting account did she give me of her being preserved, from perishing with hunger, by means of a little child, whom heaven at the cottage sent to her support!

After the lovely mistress of my soul was retired to rest, I dispatched Tomkins with a long letter to my mother at Harley House, which was only twelve miles distance from whence we were. I wrote fully; and gave her a particular account of Miss Sidney's sufferings, her uncommon merit, family, fortune, &c. and of my fixed intentions (with her

her approbation) of making her my wife.—I begged she would send her coach early in the morning, with my sister in it, to attend Miss Sidney to Harley House; as, till we were united, I begged she might remain under her protection. Having settled this matter, I retired to bed—but not to sleep;—the gratitude I owed to heaven for this wonderful event of happiness, was not the least rapturous emotion which employed my waking hours.

In the morning, on sending up my name, to enquire how the lady did, I was astonished to find, that, on hearing it announced, she fell into violent screamings, and an hystERIC fit.

—I ran to her apartment, where I found her shrieking in the arms of the landlady of the house. “O save me—save me, from the vile abandoned man!” were the words she uttered.—You may imagine my astonishment was great;—I feared her late frights might have affected her senses, and enquired the cause of this sudden disorder, — when the mistress informed me, my servant came up, with his master’s, Sir Harry Beaumont’s compliments, and that he would breakfast with her, if agreeable, in the dining room.—“Gracious heaven! (I now exclaimed) I see—I see, the whole affair.—She certainly does not yet know, and I, in my hurry, and rapture of yesterday (such strange in-

confederate

considerate folks are we *lovers*) forgot to acquaint her, that I had changed my name, and taken my title."

By proper remedies, however, Miss Sidney opened her languid eyes. I was going to bleed her, when she softly exclaimed, "O, heavens! Mr. Harley, is it you?—Is it my deliverer?" and enquiring tenderly after the wound in my arm (which however is not considerable) I had the joy of soon seeing the roses again visit her fair cheek, and her fine eyes sparkling with pleasure at my sight.—I dismissed the mistress of the house and her maids, who were all thunderstruck, as well they might, at the strangeness of the above scene.—

Being

110 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

Being soon perfectly recovered of her fright, this charming woman joined me in the dining-room, where, after breakfast, a very affecting conversation ensued, in which she gave me, with the eloquence of an angel, and in a tone of speech "sweeter than another's song," a most moving account of her sufferings; her imprudent mother's marriage with the vile impostor; his base attempts; her escape; her passing for a married woman at ———; and, O Charles! how did here her sweet confusion betray the *cause* of what she told me she had suffered by that innocent deception! —She hesitated,----she blushed.---She then proceeded to her going to Kensington to lodge; her poverty, and her escaping

HISTORY OF Miss SIDNEY. 111

escaping there again from the vilest of men, who, she was informed, lodged in the very house.

“Yes, my lovely angel (cried I, clasping her to my breast) you did indeed fly from Sir Harry Beaumont.--- But why (continued I, tenderly smiling) what injury had I done you, that you fled from me?”

“From you? (she cried with astonishment) was it from you I escaped with such fear and abhorrence?---O, heavens!”

Here a tender conversation ensued, in which I gave her an account of my hearing

112 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

hearing her sing to her guitar in the garden.---Again she blushed and sighed.---I also told her, I had been under the same roof with her at Richmond; during which account what sweet emotions of mingled surprize, tenderness, and astonishment, animated her bright eyes, and every expressive feature!----

“ Yes, continued I, my situation at Richmond pleased me, but I find, added I, smiling archly, there was a thief in the house;---for I lost a little miniature picture of a very great value; and the thief, if detected, shall find no mercy from me.”

“ Possibly (said she, visibly fluttered, but smiling with enchanting sweetness)

you

you may have your picture restored in due time."

I would not then distress her delicacy with telling her I had seen it in her lovely bosom, as she lay sleeping on her bed.---In the most pathetic terms she told me, she had worked for her living at Richmond. "Yes, said I, pressing her charming hand to my lips; yes, these hands have been employed in ----- gracious God! was it for me?"

Here the starting tear of compassion for her late distressed situation rose to my eye,---which she observing,---"For you; was it Mr. Harley? --- I should have

have been happy if I had known I had been employed in your service."--- Those words escaped her;---when blushing,---" I had a friend who sweetened all my labours, as a guitar, she sent me, an elegant assortment of books, and other valuable things, beguiled me of many a solitary moment."

" I am happy (said I, without thinking that moment what I was saying) if that little present in the least contributed to beguile the hour of affliction."

Here I looked down, and I suppose betrayed some aukward emotion,---for she instantly exclaimed.---Good God!

Mr.

Mr. Harley! is it possible?---could you?---My amazement!---but could it, ---was it?---O my oppressed, my grateful heart!---Here a shower of tears, of tender gratitude, fell from her bright eyes.---“It is too much,---Mr. Harley,---too much,”---continued she, even sobbing, with the mingled passions of gratitude, delight, and---oh! my transported heart! let me add---love!

I clasped her to my breast, with an energy no words can describe, whilst a kind of sacred transport kept us a few moments silent.---Her head was reclined on my shoulder, whilst she was at that moment insensible of the honour she did me in that enchanting attitude:---

when,

when, softly withdrawing herself from my arms in a sweet confusion, I begged her not to mention, or ever after to talk of gratitude or favours owed to a man who would sacrifice his life for her defence.

“ Ah! my generous friend, she replied, *that* you have endeavoured to do already.”

I now seized the favourable moment of offering, in the most explicit terms, my hand and fortune to her acceptance: I urged the danger she must inevitably be exposed to, from perhaps the renewed persecutions of the vilest of men, whilst she remained in a single state;
and,

and, till she permitted me the honour of being her protector, my mother's house should be her safe asylum.

She blushed,---she hung her head.---
“ I must confess”---she paused, she hesitated.

“ What would my charming Miss Sidney confess?”

“ That you, Sir, are not indifferent to me. After what my generous protector has done for me, it would be surely the height of affectation to say otherwise.---If Mrs. Harley approves the union---for, alas! (again weeping) I have no father----no mother----I will
unre-

118 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
unreservedly own to you, I can have
no objection."

O, Charles!—

" I never knew till now,
" To what a pitch I lov'd her. O she shot
" Ten thousand charms into my inmost soul!
" She look'd so mild, so amiably gentle,
" She bow'd her head, she glow'd with such
 " confusion,
" Such loveliness of modesty! she is,
" In gracious mind, in manners, and in per-
 " son,
" The perfect model of all female beauty!"

Oh, my friend,---she is---(transport-
- ing thought!) she is mine for ever!---
Her voice, unusually sweet, compared

to

to any other, is peculiarly so, whenever she addresses me.

“ Sweet as the shepherd’s pipe,

“ When all his little flock’s at feed before

“ him.”

She will call me by no other name than Mr. Harley,---as even, she says, the very sound of Sir Harry Beaumont fills her with dread.---We spent some hours, some delicious hours, in a conversation equally tender and refined.---These, my Stanley, are the joys of delicate, of virtuous love.---Little is the sensualist, the roving libertine, with all his selfish raptures, acquainted with the least sentiment, of these exalted, these heart-felt joys;

“ Where

120 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

“ Where friendship full-exerts her softest

“ power,

“ Perfect esteem enliven'd by desire

“ Ineffable, and sympathy of soul,

“ Thought meeting thought, and will prevent-

“ ing will,

“ With boundless confidence ; for nought but

“ love

“ Can answer love, and render bliss secure.”

Our tender *tête-à-tête* was now interrupted by the arrival of my mother's coach, in which that dear parent herself came (to shew her respect for my fair charge) attended by Fanny my amiable sister. You will imagine my joy in introducing them to the loveliest of women. I saw, that both my mother and sister were struck with her
fine

fine form and manner, which may be deemed elegance itself. I left the ladies together, whose acquaintance began with immediate intimacy, whilst I ordered a dinner suitable to this amiable company; after which we set out for Harley House; sweet Fanny all the time devouring every word which came from Miss Sidney's mouth, and looking upon her as a being of a superior order; whilst she, with mingled dignity and sweetness—but here again language must fail.—I said, *we* went to Harley House;—that is, I escorted the ladies there, and delivered the mistress of my soul into the safe and tender protection of my excellent mother, who, smiling, told me, she should be careful of the

sacred deposit, till my return, when she should deliver her up to me for life. My eyes, sufficiently, at this declaration, testified the unbounded rapture of my heart; and, casting a look at my lovely angel, hers were bent on the ground in sweet confusion.—It was then resolved by these delicate minds (and indeed my own mind dictated to me the same thought, painful as it was to leave my charmer, for only three days) that I had better not take up my abode at my mother's, on my first escorting Miss Sidney there; as the servants, from the circumstance of my rescuing her on the road, from the vile wretch she was with, might have raised some gossiping tale injurious to her reputation. For
her

her sake alone then, who is the most delicate and noble-minded of women, I have consented to absent myself from Harley House for three days; during which I shall fly to London, and settle my affairs at Richmond:—and perhaps, (extatic thought!) procure the *special licence*, and *ring*, which will make Miss Sidney mine for ever.—And O! ye heavenly powers, who have so wonderfully led me through this labyrinth of doubts and perplexities to my present felicity, teach me the lesson of humble gratitude for the inestimable gift.

Miss Sidney is as much delighted with your approaching union with her beloved friend as I am.—I wish the

124 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
same day, which will make me the
happiest of men, could be your happy
day also:—but that we can settle.

I am now but five miles from Harley House, (waiting for a gentleman who attends me to London) at an old shattered building call the *New Inn*, which, about a century ago, was properly styled so. The present master of it, having been an old servant in my father's family, I shall always respect; and his silver hairs claim my reverence. I love to hear him talk of my honoured parent; though I am sure to feel pain, whilst he is recounting some affecting incident which happened in their youthful

ful days, to see the tear of gratitude run down his aged cheek.

“ Ah! master Harry, — (for so he still calls me) I remember when I carried you to school in your green vest, in these now very old arms, to learn your A, B, C, of dame Primrose, down in the village, by the Five Oaks. You dearly loved a little play as you went, and I kept counsel, as my poor old master used to say—“ Honest Peter, (as he was pleased to call me)—loves my boy—(begging your worship’s pardon for calling you a *boy*.)—But, Sir, I wish I could live to see the day when you would bring a lady down to Harley House.—I would do my best to

dance at your honour's wedding, and so would my old dame.—Ah! when my old master was married, what doings was there!—the whole county came in :—but now the fashion is altered.”

“ Perhaps (said I, smiling) honest Peter, you will be at another wedding soon.”

“ Do ye think so, Sir?—Ah! blessings on your heart.—But you only joke with an old man, I doubt: You fine gentlemen, now-a-days, be not so *fond of marriage*.—I shall never forget my poor master's wedding day.—Sheep roasted whole :—all the young maids and men in the parish, dancing on the
great

great bowling-green in the park:—bells ringing for a week.—No, no, there will be no such doings now-a-days:—it is gone—it is gone.”

I never, my friend, visit Harley House without calling on this good old man.—I sometimes spend a night here, merely for the *good* of his house, when I am always complimented with sleeping in the best tapestry room, as it is called; the figures in which, having been a prey to the moth for these hundred years, afford a most striking lesson on the ravages of time, and are to be looked upon as a venerable piece of antiquity; being the last remains of some old furniture in Harley Abbey, which

belonged to my ancestors in the time of the civil wars, the ruins of which are only now remaining. In this venerable apartment I am writing to you, on a table on which are a hundred curious devices, carved in the days of yore.—But, ah, my friend, I can attend to nothing within this old building, whilst through the “storied window richly dight,” and betwixt the panes of painted glass, I descry at this moment, though at some miles distant,

“In the deep gloom of yon imperious bowers,”

the hospitable roof of Harley House—
 “bosomed-high in lofty trees.”—What
 an exquisite delight is there in viewing,
 even

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even at this distance, that venerable grove of oaks, that waving avenue of pines, which shelter the dwelling in which is contained all my soul holds dear!—Breath soft ye winds!—and may no rough blast, disturb the sweet repose of my lovely angel.—But not another word on the inexhaustible subject of her praise.—Write immediately, and with a thousand wishes for your felicity, believe me,

Most faithfully yours,

H. H. B.

Miss SIDNEY, to Miss WOODLEY.

Harley-House.

I WILL suppose, my beloved Harriet, that you have received my miserable letter wrote from a wretched cottage on Bagshot Heath; and also, I will suppose, that before now, Mr. Stanley has informed you, by the account from his excellent friend, that he (by the *wonder-working* hand of Providence) found me at that wretched cottage, in the utmost danger and distress; that he rescued me most nobly, from the vilest of abandoned villains; that

he

he conveyed me to this hospitable mansion, after his excellent mother and amiable sister had met us at the town of ———; all these happy incidents I will suppose you are acquainted with:—but, O my friend, it is not—cannot be in the power of language to describe to you, the generous, the noble behaviour of my glorious deliverer!

“ All quick heroic ardor ! temper’d soft

“ With gentleness of heart, and manly reason !

“ If Virtue were to wear a human form,

“ To light it with her dignity, and flame,

“ Then softening mix her smiles, and tender

“ graces,

“ O, she would chuse the person of my Har-

“ ley !”—

For so, by the beloved name of Harley, must I still call him:—the very title of a Sir Harry Beaumont making me yet shudder.

Bless me, my dear, think of my flying from the only man on earth I ever did, or ever can love; from the unfortunate mistake of believing he was my most mortal foe!—O Providence! thou secret wonder-working hand, that with majestic silence rules the whole of this invisible machine, permit me, with humble adoration, to bend my knee to thee, in wondering praise and gratitude, for these thy astonishing acts of goodness.

“ Let

“ Let none, my friend, despair, who trust in
“ Virtue.”

How shall I sufficiently describe to you the worth of the good Mrs. Harley, whose behaviour to me is perfectly parental?—She weeps over the sad tale of my late distresses, with the tender concern of a fond mother.—Or how shall I find expressions adequate to describe the lovely form of Fanny Harley?—A beautiful young girl of eighteen,—highly accomplished,—her fine expressive eyes, like those of my Harley, beaming with every virtue.—But what chiefly endears her to my fond heart, is, that she loves her admirable brother with an excess of affection.—If perfect
bliss

bliss can fall to a mortal's lot, I surely am at this moment in the possession of it.—This day month is fixed for giving my hand,—ah, Harriet!—to the most excellent of men.—An affectation of delay, on my part, to my noble deliverer, to my glorious protector, would be the highest degree of absurdity.—Besides, my dear, he knows, from a thousand unguarded expressions I have dropped,—nay, even from as many particular circumstances in my behaviour, how dear—how justly beloved he has been by your poor Lucy,—even on my very first acquaintance:—but to you, my faithful friend, have I long since revealed the secret of my heart.—O, my Harriet, I am covered with confusion.

fusion when I reflect that Mr. Harley one night heard me singing in the garden at Kensington, some plaintive lines, which were too expressive of my tender attachment. O, heavens! little did I—could I imagine, that he was listening to my melancholy strains! And it was the very next morning too, mysterious heaven! that I fled from him!—fled from the man, who was decreed to be my guardian angel and deliverer.

It is, however, some small relief to my delicacy (for I will not call it *pride*) that he knows not that *I* was the thief, who stole the picture.—He mentioned the *theft*;—and I thought he smiled—Why did he smile?—I am convinced
it

it must be impossible he can know it is in my possession:—it is indeed, at this moment, in my bosom, where it has remained ever since I committed the robbery;—and this little secret he never shall be acquainted with, till I have given him my hand.

I felicitate you, my beloved friend, on your approaching union with so excellent a young man as Mr. Stanley.—I hear nothing here but his praises, and that he perfectly resembles, both in temper and person, my amiable Harley.—But can he be so good? can he be so generous?—so humane?—It is impossible—at least I think so—for any human being to be so perfect as my Henry.

Mr.

Mr. Stanley's seat, I find, is in this county.—What dreams of happiness do I indulge myself with, in the sweet hope, that I shall be so near my dearest Harriet for the remainder of my life!

I long, my dear, to hear from you extremely.—I charge you never call me lady Beaumont :—the very name (such is the force of habitual fear) makes me shudder.—I had rather a thousand times be plain Mrs. Harley.—But I am this instant called by this sweet girl Fanny, to visit a beautiful grotto, (the work of her own hands) under a hanging rock, by the side of a river, on the banks of which, in all probability, we shall ramble

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ble about till evening.—Adieu, there-
fore, my dear, for the present.



Monday

O, Harriet, pity my confusion :—I
die with shame.—my theft is discover-
ed ;—and how shall I be able to see his
face again ?—but hear this sad disaster.

I was in the midst of dressing to-day,
before dinner, when I heard a gentle
tap at my chamber door.—I, believing
it to be Miss Harley, ran to the door
(the maid, who attends me, being gone
down

down for a few moments)—but, good heavens! who should it be but her amiable brother!—I started back;—for, bless me, my dear, my hair was all dishevelled;—no handkerchief in the world round my neck,—and the first object which presented itself to him, was the *little picture* hanging on my breast.—Imagine my confusion;—which was still heightened by his clasping me, on this discovery, to his bosom, in a transport not to be expressed—whilst I hung my head and looked like a guilty thief as I was.—I struggled hard to disengage myself from his too tender grasp;—when he exclaimed, “And have I, at last, found out the fair culprit?—Be assured I will punish you most severely.”

ly.”—A million of fine things he now said, which I will not repeat, whilst I looked foolish enough :—but how great was my astonishment, when he fairly confessed at last, that he knew I had the picture *all* the time !—“ But, continued he, when my Lucy has given me her hand, then, and not till then, will I tell her how I came to be acquainted with the enchanting secret.”

What could he mean, my dear ? He never could see it in my possession—No—that was impossible.—I wish he had told me what he really meant :---but he has a hundred delicacies, a hundred refinements of sentiment, which no man, but himself, had ever an idea of.----I

got

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got him, however, out of my apartment as well as I could, and am set down to scribble the little incident to my Harriet.---Here he comes again.--- He snatches the pen out of my hand, and tells me, he must have my letter, this moment, to enclose in one to Mr. Stanley. On the condition he will himself add a postscript, I resign my pen.



Mr.

Mr. HARLEY to Miss WOODLEY.

MADAM,

IF any thing can add to the extreme felicity of the happy man, who, on the twentieth day of the next month, will have the supreme delight of calling the loveliest of women his bride, it will be the additional heart-felt hope, that, on *that* day likewise, Miss Sidney's charming friend will give her hand to the most amiable man on earth.----I need not tell the fair lady to whom I have the honour of addressing these lines, that I mean my excellent friend Mr.

Stanley.

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Stanley. Hasten, dearest Madam, his felicity; and may that happy day be as auspicious to you both, as to

Your most sincere,

And obedient servant,

H. HARLEY BEAUMONT.

And now being again in the possession of the pen, permit me to add, and to your tenderly affectionate,

LUCY SIDNEY.

Miss

*Miss WOODLEY to Miss SIDNEY, in
Answer to the foregoing Letter.*

German Spa.

YES, my dearest friend, distant and
absent as I am, I have heard, by
Mr. Stanley's accounts from his excel-
lent friend, every interesting particular
relative to your approaching happy
union with that most worthy man.----I
had almost (till your noble deliverer re-
scued you from the vilest of wretches)
"wept my spirit from mine eyes," at
the heart-moving recital of your dis-
tresses. The eventful history of your
life,

life, my Lucy, could it be transmitted to posterity, would afford a most instructive lesson of this great truth, that *suffering innocence is the peculiar care of heaven*;—which, you plainly see, has led you, though lost to hope, through an abyss of perplexities, poverty, and distress, to the highest degree of human felicity.—*Let none, therefore, despair, who rely for help, on the Providence of the Almighty.*

I, too, my dearest Lucy, am happy; superlatively so, in the approaching prospect of being united, for life, to a most worthy and amiable man. And though I esteem the character of your beloved Harley, “next to idolatry,”—

yet I cannot, must not think him more generous, more humane, or more excellent than my Stanley.—O, my dear! were I to tell you of his patient merit, with regard to myself, his silent, long, respectful passion (for I find my uncle knew of it some years since, though he, from an unaccountable caprice in his temper, concealed the affair, pretending a dislike to Mr. Stanley, for no earthly reason, but that he heard he was going to stand for the county, in opposition to him,) was I, I say, my dear, able to enumerate all this worthy young man has suffered for my sake, (even to the prejudice of his health) you would then acknowledge with me, that I can never sufficiently return so
tender

tender and faithful a passion.—My uncle, by way of reparation, for concealing what he was entrusted to reveal to me, (I mean Mr. Stanley's attachment to me, having only given me a small hint of it, which I mentioned in one of my letters, though I had not then an opportunity of saying more) my good uncle, I say, is now, from an unaccountable whim, grown so fond of Mr. Stanley, that he will scarce suffer him a moment to be absent from his sight:—but we will allow an old man of seventy-five, to have caprices:—and he now is hurrying on the match, with an assiduity equal to what my impatient lover himself can desire.—He read Mr. Harley's obliging postscript.—“ The

148 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

“ twentieth of next month !—hasten his
“ felicity !—Aye, to be sure you shall.
“ —What say ye, Harriet ?—I will
“ have no *squeamish* deferring of the
“ day—No *mincing*, coy airs of—*stay*
“ *a little longer*. You like this man—
“ and he likes you : therefore, in God’s
“ name, the sooner you are married the
“ better.” —I may then, my Lucy,
venture to pronounce, that *your* happy
day will be *mine likewise* ; and, indeed,
an affectation of *over-delicacy* in these
matters, I have often thought a most
ridiculous absurdity in a woman, and a
very *ill* compliment to the man with
whom she is under an engagement to
spend the remainder of her days.

And

And so, my Lucy, you insist on my calling you plain Mrs. Harley.—What has the title of *Ladyship* no charms—no weight with you? — Ah! my sweet friend, how many hundred women sacrifice every comfort, every happiness of their lives, merely for that empty sound of—“ your ladyship!”—Whilst you, with the same noble sentiments, which directs all your actions, despise every thing but *real merit*!—But you are a wonderful girl—and ever was.

I hope you are now sufficiently acquainted, who the kind author of all those presents were:—I am even more pleased with his extreme delicacy and refinement, in his manner of presenting

150 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
them, than with even the well-chosen,
noble presents themselves.—But he is
an astonishing young man!—Heavens!
what a transcendent generosity, what an
image of

“All perfect goodness in his mind!”

“A beam from heaven—glowing with every
“virtue.”

Mr. Stanley, my dear, has told me
all, and the moment I heard Mr. Har-
ley had changed his name, to the *dread-*
ed title of Sir Harry Beaumont, I sat
down to inform you of the interesting
event:—but I, unfortunately, it seems,
sent my letter by a Mr. Mordaunt, a
particular friend of my uncle's, who is
detained,

detained, I hear, at Paris, by a very dangerous illness.—As he proposed being in a very short time in England, I thought it more expeditious than trusting to the common packet; but, though you have not yet received that *momentous* letter of mine, you will now, at least, know I was not negligent in any circumstance which affected the happiness of my dearest friend.

O, Lucy! what must have been the transport of the enraptured Mr. Harley (for I *must not* call him Sir Harry Beaumont) to have heard you singing by moon light in the garden at Kensington!—He wrote *such* a letter to Mr. Stanley upon the subject!—But

you will one day see it.---I am also acquainted with another little secret, about the *picture*,---but I will say nothing.----I can keep counsel.----“Provoking Harriet (you cry) tell me this moment what you mean.”---Indeed I shall not---I leave *that* for Mr. Harley to tell---after your day is past.---As instead of your bride-maid, which you know I always said I would be, I am myself, (as Lucentio says in the Taming of the Shrew) “to practice how to *bride* it,”---let our *dresses* be the *same* my dear, on this important day that is approaching.----Mine will be (for you know it would be ridiculous to be stuck out in a full dress, and a great hoop) only a white lustring Polaneze, trimmed
with

HISTORY OF Miss SIDNEY. 153

with an elegant, narrow, silver edging. No ornament on my head but a little chip hat, trimmed with a silver blond. My hands, however, will be richly decked with diamond bracelets. To one, will be fixed the sweet resemblance of my Lucy (which she presented me last year) to the other, that of my amiable lover.----My uncle, who is *quite* alive, and grown gay and young again, (for a wedding in a family, I have always observed, is looked upon as a most *joyous* affair) wants me to be dizen'd out in *all* my jewels, with a flaming gold brocade full suit; and he has begun talking this fortnight of getting every thing ready---“that something, he says, may be going forward.”----He really

154 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
distresses me---perpetually introducing
Mr. Stanley to people of his acquaint-
ance at the wells, and rooms---with---
“ This, Sir, is Mr. Stanley ——— a
very worthy gentleman, who is just on
the point of marriage with my neice
Harriet here.”---Do not you pity me,
Lucy?---but you know my uncle’s cha-
racter exactly; which is, a well-mean-
ing, bustling, honest, west country
’Squire:—not *over-delicate* in his noti-
ons. He seems now determined to make
up, for all his late ill-humour during
his long illness, on which account I
freely forgive him.

Ah! my friend, I little thought *my*
wedding day would have been *yours*;—
but

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 155

but I was, somehow, *kindly forced* into the *snare*. — Over-persuaded—Lucy.— Now, instead of strewing the way to church with flowers (as I always said I would) for my *Lucy*, I shall be *myself*, trembling and quaking, before the dean of W——, who is to perform the ceremony in the English chapel here.

Mr. Stanley, has a small present for you—but let him speak for himself, as he says he will not be behind-hand in a postscript with his friend Sir Harry.

My uncle calls me to go to a hundred places.—Adieu, therefore, my beloved Lucy Sidney, (the last time I

H 6

shall

156 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

shall call you by that *dear* name) and
believe me now, and for ever,

Yours, most faithfully,

HARRIET WOODLEY.



POST.

P O S T S C R I P T.

Mr. STANLEY, to Miss SIDNEY.

MADAM,

YOU will forgive, I know, the impertinence of a man to whom your late sufferings, as well as approaching prospect of happiness, have too much excited my tenderest attention and warmest wishes, for both the happiness of the lovely Miss Sidney, and my excellent Harley, to suffer me to be silent on the ensuing joyful event.—Yes, Madam,

158 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
dam, the day which gives you to the
arms of the best of men, will also crown
my wishes in the possession of your
charming friend.—Permit me the ho-
nour of your wearing on that day, the
enclosed bracelets * of two persons,
who, with the utmost pleasure, sub-
scribe themselves,

Your most sincerely,

Affectionate friends,

HARRIET WOODLEY,
and

CHARLES STANLEY.

* A beautiful pair of diamond bracelets;
one with the picture of Miss Woodley, set
round with diamonds; the other of Mr. Stan-
ley, ornamented in the same manner.

Lady

Lady BEAUMONT to Mrs. STANLEY.

Harley House.

“ Whilst nothing meets my eye but sights of
“ bliss,”

I TAKE up my pen to send a thousand congratulations, a thousand tender wishes for your and Mr. Stanley's happiness; which, by a letter to my *dearest husband*—(Ah, Harriet! I may say with Blanche, in Shakespeare's King John,

“ How *new* the name of *husband* in my
“ mouth!”)

I find

160 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

I find commenced the same day that mine did. I am indeed arrived at the very summit of all earthly felicity:—and,

“ O wonder-working hand,

“ That in majestic silence, sways at will

“ The mighty movements of unbounded nature ;

“ O grant me, heaven ! the *virtues* to sustain,

“ This wond’rous change.”

Your good man writes, that in a few weeks you all return to England:—transporting tidings ! I will therefore defer ten thousand things I have to say till that happy period arrives.—I will, however, tell you, that the good Mrs. Harley kept open house at this old hospitable

pitable mansion, for ten days, on account of our nuptials:—the *day* itself was spent with the utmost festivity, joy, and elegance.—I had not, indeed, my Harriet to strew my path to church with flowers, but I had six little girls (lovely as angels) their hair dressed with ribbons, and flowers, who, with each a small basket under her arm, stood ready at the church gate to perform this old English ceremony. — The young men and maids of the village, had a tent pitched for them in the lawn before the house, where they all danced till morning.—How much, my sweet friend, is our *own* happiness heightened, when we are making *others* happy too !

My

My dress, on the above joyous occasion, was exactly what my Harriet mentioned.—Mr. Stanley's elegant present exceeds all I can say of gratitude;—those beautiful bracelets adorned my hands, whilst the sweet likeness of my lovely friend, and her amiable spouse, were too pleasing objects not to be every moment regarded with an eye of silent joy. Mr. Harley says, he shall be jealous of the constant attention I pay to the resemblance of his friend.—He is now racking his brain for what he shall send you in return.—Whether it will be a bouquet of diamonds for your bosom (that seat of spotless faith, and friendship) or a bracelet, with his picture, is the grand point in debate.

O, Har-

O, Harriet! this beloved man, yesterday (and not before) discovered to me, *where* he had seen his little picture, after I had committed the theft at Richmond. — Bless me, my dear, why, I was sleeping on my bed! — and you — provoking — (girl, I was going to say, but you are now a *married woman*, and I restrain my angry pen) — knew of this.

And have you and I, my dear, been really married three weeks? — Most certainly. It seems to me but *one* rapturous moment. — I can only say, my happiness is so much like that of the tender pair in Mr. Thomson's charming poem
on

164 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
on summer, that these elegant lines of
his, perpetually recur to my mind :

———“ Such their guileless passion is,
“ As in the dawn of time inform'd the heart
“ Of innocence, and undissembling truth.
“ 'Tis friendship heighten'd by the mutual
“ wish,
“ Th' enchanting hope, and sympathetic glow,
“ Beam'd from the mutual eye. Devoting all
“ To love, each is to each a dearer self ;
“ Supremely happy, in th' awaken'd power
“ Of giving joy.”

I had scarce written the above lines,
when my dearest husband enters.—He
reads what is wrote !—he strains me to
his fond bosom !—and whilst his cheek
is pressed to mine, whispers to my soul

unut-

unutterable things!—while the tear of affection glistens in my eye, he prevents it stealing down my face, by a tender kiss—softly, sweetly impressed on my glowing cheek; whilst my head is reclined on his beloved breast.—
 “Ineffable delight, and sympathy of soul!”---These, my Harriet,

“Are the joys of virtuous love,
 “And thus our moments fly.”

In the midst of this tender luxury, a letter is brought to my Harley;----he opens it;---but, good heavens! what is our mutual amazement to see it dated,----astonishing!----from *Newgate*! We both eagerly look over the contents;

166 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
tents;---they fill me with horror.---
But read here, my friend, the shocking
letter.

To Sir HARRY BEAUMONT.

S I R,

Newgate.

WE beg leave to trouble you in
behalf of an unhappy malefactor, now
under condemnation of death, for se-
veral forgeries, and other capital crimes.
---His real name is O'Neal;---though
he has assumed another for some time
past.---This wretched man now lies dan-
gerously ill.---Those of the faculty who
attend him declare, it is impossible he
should

should live three days: he is, however, at intervals, perfectly sensible; when he, with repeated intreaties, begs you would favour him with your presence for a few minutes; as he solemnly avers he has something to communicate to you, relative to the fortune of your excellent lady, of the utmost importance. He frequently calls on your name, and says he cannot die in peace, till he has seen you, and implored your forgiveness.---What the unhappy man means, we know not;---but imagine it is relative to some forgery. Your known character, Sir, for humanity, will best dictate to you, whether, or not, to comply with the last request of this wicked, but now repentant, and dying
man

168 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
man---We leave it to your compassion;
---but it is our joint opinion, that your
presence would greatly soothe the hor-
ror of his dying moments, before he
enters into a boundless eternity."

This letter, Harriet, is signed with
the names of the ordinary and keeper,
and of the physician and apothecary who
attend the miserable man.---O, my dear
friend, what a shocking account!----
Just heaven be merciful to the poor
wicked wretch!---and may his present
sufferings expiate his horrid crimes!

After we had again, and again look-
ed over this dreadful epistle,---"What
(said

(said I, with eyes, which I fancy had *speech* in them) what, my dearest husband, do you intend to do?—Not go, I hope!—a thousand fears ——”

“ Do, my Lucy?—Can the dreadful case admit one moment’s doubt?—I will instantly set out to attend this poor wretch :—possibly I may sooth his dying moments.—I may, with the sweet aid of sacred pity, for one minute, breath comfort, perhaps :—and sprinkle peace through the last hours of the unhappy man.—I will pray by him ;—pray for him ;—do any thing, and every thing, that can afford him the least ease at this dreadful period.—Gracious heaven! can I support the thought, that I

can, for one moment, forbear to alleviate the dying pangs of a fellow creature, and neglect to pour the balm of pity in his wounded heart—torn, alas! with the agonizing torments of guilt, and the additional miseries of suffering a painful illness in a loathsome jail!—Forbid it heaven!—to whose restraining, and preventing grace alone, it is, that I, alas! poor, frail, erring man, am not, at this moment, as culpable as the unhappy O'Neale. I am too much a man *myself* not to *feel as* a man;—far, far from me, be that *proud*, supercilious, affected *virtue*, which can disdain the sufferings of the *lowest* and most *abject* of my fellow creatures.—I must, I will attend him.”

O, my

O, my Harriet, what a man is my Harley!—He rose to pull the bell to give orders.

“ My love! (said your poor trembling Lucy) do you—can you really intend to venture on this dangerous visit?—Let me beg—let me conjure you not to think of it.—Who knows but the whole may be some infernal stratagem to get you in the hands again of that wicked man, who, no doubt, has heard of our marriage, and is doubly incensed against you.---I have a thousand fears ;---a thousand dreadful ideas fill my trembling heart for your safety. ---The man so very vile---so intrepid---what horrid plot for your life may he

172 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
not have formed!----I shudder at the
very apprehension of your entering a
dreadful cell in Newgate, surrounded,
shocking thought! by a set of infernal
wretches, as wicked as himself. The
names with which the letter is subscrib-
ed, may all be feigned;---another of
his vile forgeries.----Besides, granting
it were all true, in all probability, be-
fore you can arrive at the horrid man-
sion, he will have paid the last debt to
nature.---Let me conjure you then, my
beloved Henry, to drop all thoughts
of going on this dreadful business."

"In vain, my dearest love, said he,
is all your eloquence on this occasion;
---in vain your tender, causeless fears:
---the

HISTORY OF Miss SIDNEY. 173

---the voice of sacred pity pleads so strongly in my heart for this poor wretch, I must obey its impulse. For thy dear sake I will take every necessary caution. ---The physician, whose name is subscribed to the letter, is my intimate friend :---I shall first call on him to know the exact truth of the affair.----Set that tender heart at rest then :---and may every good angel shield my sweet Lucy, till my return."

This worthiest of men having said this, he fondly clasped me to his breast, whilst the tear of anxious tenderness for his safety, stole down my cheek.---"Go then, said I, and may heaven protect

174 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
you!---But, ah! I yet fear, and shall
be wretched till you return."

He is gone, my Harriet!---the most
humane, and benevolent of men, is
gone to the relief of that vilest of be-
ings.---But let me harbour no farther
resentment against a *dying* man.---Poor,
wicked wretch!---I forgive him, and
may heaven, in its infinite goodness,
take him to its mercy!---I must now lay
down my tired pen;---for till I have a
letter from my beloved Henry, my
mind is one continued scene of tumult,
fear, and timid weakness,----He may
perhaps be assassinated:---he may be----
but be hushed my fears:---has he not
thee, Almighty Father, the friend and
guar-

guardian of the righteous, to aid, and to support him?

Fanny Harley knocks at my door:---sweet girl!---what would she have?---Only a walk, she says, to the Old Abbey, to inspect a little grotto, she is going to make under the ruins:---the air may relieve my spirits.----To-morrow good Mrs. Harley proposes a little ramble for the day, merely to divert your poor Lucy.---Adieu then, till I have a letter from my Harley.



Tuesday

He is safe, my Harriet!---the best of men, I thank heaven, is safe!---My

176 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
tender fears for his welfare, are all relieved by the arrival of the wished-for letter, which I transcribe for your perusal: the contents of which shock my whole frame. Gracious God, receive the soul of the poor wicked wretch!-- But read the letter here; for I no more can paint his dying agonies, than I can the transcendent generosity and heavenly compassion of my excellent husband on this occasion.



Sir

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Sir HARRY BEAUMONT to Lady BEAUMONT.

London.

My dearest Love,

I Dispatch this by a special messenger, to ease thy tender heart,—thy anxious fears.—Be in no pain for me, who am in perfect health and safety; but let your tears flow—(I give them leave) for the wretched, the guilty, poor dying man, I have just been visiting.—I have this moment left a scene which has *barrowed* up my very soul. — Pray, my Lucy, pray to heaven to release, and

178 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

to receive the miserable O'Neale to mercy.—Let not thy heart (the seat of spotless innocence) disdain to plead—to pour out at the throne of grace, thy earnest prayers for this guilty criminal. Never can you offer them on a more affecting occasion:—never can the divine mercy have more crimes to pardon. You begged me to be very minute, take then, my love, the sad recital.

On my arrival in town, I instantly ordered my carriage to drive to the house of Dr. H——. Alas! I found the dreadful account in the letter I received, was but too true. The above worthy man informed me, the wretched O'Neale, he imagined, could survive

vive but a few hours, and that no time was to be lost.—The doctor attended me in my chariot to the horrid receptacle of guilt and misery.—On our way to it, he informed me—the dying man had been detected a few weeks since, in two very capital forgeries for large sums:—that for above a week he had laid in a violent fever, from which (his constitution so extremely shattered by his debaucheries) it was impossible he should recover:—that he had been for three days in a strong delirium, in which he had made some shocking discoveries of his former crimes:—that he raved continually on my name, and on another,—which I will not shock your tender breast to mention.—By this time

180 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
we were arrived at the horrid mansion.
—We alighted;—the night was dark
and gloomy;—St. Sepulchre's bell had
just struck ten. A turnkey, whose obscure
and dismal countenance was sufficiently
expressive of the horrors which sur-
rounded us, appeared with a dark lan-
thorn. We were conducted through a
long, damp, and noisome passage, to a
few stone steps, which descending,
brought us to the door of those miser-
able cells, appropriated for the recep-
tion of the most wretched of human
beings, a criminal under sentence of
death.—Ah! my Lucy, we that roll in
affluence, ease, and security, are abso-
lute strangers to these *real* scenes of
horror, which encompass these poor *out-*
casts

casts of human nature. As we were still following our shabby guide, by a dim, winking lamp, through a narrow dark passage beyond description horrid, and by the side of cells, in which methought I heard groans of condemned criminals, I could not help exclaiming to myself in the words of Lear :

—————“ Take physic, pomp,
 “ Expose thyself to feel, what wretches feel,
 “ That thou may’st shake the superflux to
 “ them.”

We were now arrived at a small door, bolted, and double-locked. — By the side of it hung a winking lamp, just expiring, emblem of the dying wretch within the cell; the door of which,
 our

our gloomy guide now opened on its grating hinges.—We entered—when, gracious heaven! what a scene presented itself!—The dying man, who was just then fallen into a short slumber, lay extended on a miserable bed;—a few dying embers, in a chafing-dish, to dispel the noisome damps, stood in one corner; in the other, I could discern, lay some rusty chains and irons, the late manacles of some departed criminal.—I found here the apothecary and ordinary;—both sensible men.—I enquired (whilst the poor wretch lay in a kind of doze) if he were in want of such necessaries as his shocking state required; and taking a twenty pound note from my pocket book, desired the
keeper,

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 183

keeper, who now joined us, to expend it on whatever the unhappy man might have occasion for.—He replied, there was at present no occasion for my bounty, for that two or three gentlemen (his riotous companions, I fear) had often called on him, and left in his (the keeper's) hands, a sufficient sum of cash to defray any of the necessary expences. The same gentlemen, he added, had also sent those of the faculty who now attended him in his illness.

We were now alarmed, by a dismal groan, from the poor wretch in the bed, who, starting up, cried out, “ Is he
“ arrived? — It burns, it burns, it
“ burns!—No one will give me a drop
“ of

“ of water to cool my tongue—and I
 “ am scorched up.—I tell you, it was
 “ on parchment I engrossed the deed—
 “ dares any one to doubt my hand or
 “ seal ?”

I drew near his bed :—I took his hand.
 —“ How do you, Mr. O’Neale ? Do
 you know me, Sir ?”—He surveyed me,
 with an eager, ghastly look of affright-
 ment.—“ Yes, yes, yes, I know you
 well.—You are my brother Frank *.—
 You fell overboard in your passage

* His eldest brother ;—a worthy young man,
 whom it was suspected had foul play for his
 life, in being cruelly pushed overboard one
 night in his passage to England ;—though it was
 reported he perished accidentally.

from

from Ireland ; — could I help that ?
 Jefu—Mercy ! how hard it is to drown !
 —Hold—hold.—“ Tye more ballaft to
 “ his neck, left he swim after the fhip :
 “ —fee, fee, he holds up his hands for
 “ mercy!—Look at his freaming locks,
 “ drenched in the briny wave!—Let
 “ him make his bed in the ooze deep :
 “ —my mother’s jointure fhall not be
 “ his.—See, fee, how pale he glares !”

I was fhocked beyond expreffion :---
 we endeavoured to give him a fpoon-
 ful of a cordial :—I again fpoke to him,
 but his eyes were fixed, as if intently
 gazing on fome object at his bed fide ;
 when, holding up his emaciated hand,
 he with a piteous look exclaimed, as if
 he

he had just discovered some new object.---“ Hah! what pale fleeting form
 “ is that, which gently beckons me
 “ away?—Ah! poor lost Fanny *—The
 “ unborn infant too!—No, let that
 “ live.—Shivering and emaciated!—
 “ Yes, Yes, I know you well.—Let
 “ the accursed potions be well mixed:
 “ —no suspicion—who should suspect?
 “ —sweet girl—I’ll marry you another
 “ time:—no matter when.—Ah! where
 “ are now those coral lips,—those
 “ lovely beaming eyes,—that beautiful
 “ form?—dark are those eyes;—

* A young lady of family and merit, whom, by vile arts, he had debauched, and then left her to die in poverty, and of a broken heart.

“ pale

" pale is that cheek—a prey to worms.
 " —Ah! villain, that I was, not to
 " shield thee—thy helpless bosom!—
 " Oh, the fell stings of late, of vain
 " repentance! —Not one morsel for
 " thy famished lips!—Come, come,
 " —we will meet this night in the
 " myrtle grove by your father's house.
 " —Hah, you shriek, you fly from my
 " polluted embrace! and now you sit
 " on yonder fleecy cloud, and smile to
 " see my woes.—What---where am I?
 " ---Sad, silent!---and see the king of
 " terrors, drags, drags me down."

Here the miserable wretch lay silent
 for some minutes, when I again gently
 spoke to him.---He started up.---" Who
 calls?

188 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
calls?----Is that my uncle's voice?---
Hah!---(staring wildly) it is---it is my
murdered uncle---all grim with clotted
blood!---see, see---the *gleaming* steel *
---it was the assassin's stab;---not *mine*,
that did the cruel act,---no---no, M'Da-
niel,---do not advise the poisoned cup;
---its workings are not quick enough:
---rather strike at once the fatal blow.
---But who would have thought the old
man had so much blood in him?---Now
I roll in gold.----Here, call my ser-
vants;----order my gilt equipage;----
drive me to the gay scenes of splendid

* It was reported his unfortunate uncle lost
his life by the stab of an assassin, but in truth, it
was the wretched nephew who committed the
cruel deed for the sake of his fortune.

riot

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 189

riot and dissipation.---Gone---gone! for ever gone!---Vain, empty, cursed delusions hence!---Ah! that pale corse, deformed with murder!---Quick, snatch me hence---and give my vile carcase to the screaming ravens.---Avaunt, thou bleeding shade,---will no one take the old man from me?"---

We, the melancholy witnesses of these affecting exclamations of a guilty conscience, just entering on the borders of eternity, were standing round the miserable man, lost in silent concern and astonishment.---The worthy clergyman now attempted to pray by him,---but he had no sooner begun his pathetic petition to the God of Mercy, but the poor
wretch

190 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
wretch again broke out---“ Who talks
“ of redemption?---who talks of mer-
“ cy?---there can be none for me!---
“ the doors of heaven are shut!---the
“ fiery gulph is open to receive me!”

Perceiving there was no probability
of his being calm, the physician beg-
ged I would stay no longer, as it was
most likely these ravings would conti-
nue till morning:---when, possibly, the
unhappy wretch might drop into a slum-
ber, and wake in more composure: I
therefore thought it now best to depart,
for that night; determining early in
the morning to renew my visit.---The
physician and I then left this horrid man-
sion, being again conducted by the
same

HISTORY OF MISS SIDNEY. 191

same ill-looking guide through those gloomy passages which lead from the cells of guilt and misery.

The next morning, attended by Dr. H—— and another eminent physician, whom I called on in my way (to see if any thing in the power of medicine could avail for the unhappy man) I once more was drove to Newgate.--- In the dismal entry which led to the horrid cell, I met the apothecary, who informed me the wretched O'Neale had been relieved by a few hours sleep;--- that he seemed perfectly composed, though evidently drawing very near his end.---I entered the shocking cell, and saw a scene beyond expression affecting.

The

The first object which struck my sight, was a poor young woman, in shabby attire, weeping bitterly, and kneeling by the dying man; one arm supporting his head, whilst the other hand held a phial of hartshorn drops to his nostrils.

---This poor young creature (barely twenty years of age) I was informed was his wife, who had arrived but the night before from Ireland.---I was much affected to see a lovely little boy, about three years old, hanging on his wretched mother's gown, and crying heavily because she did.----The poor child, fobbing, applied to me with the affecting innocence of that age,---“Don't let poor papa die, Sir! do save him for poor Billy.”---I was much moved.---I

advanced

advanced to the bed:---my name being announced, the dying man held out his hand:---I took it in the most friendly manner.---“ Ah, Sir, said he, in feeble accents, this is kind to attend the last moments of the most vile---the most wicked wretch----that ever”----I interrupted him. “ Talk no more of that ---we are all frail---and, as young men, subject to the follies and levities of youth.”----“ Ah, Sir,---you are too good.---I am now going to answer “ for all.----You gave me most generously my life not long since-----“ Oh, that you had then taken it!---“ Where is that sweet excellence? “ does she---can she forgive a dying
 Vol. III. K wretch?”

"wretch *?"---I assured him, you most freely forgave him, and was offering up your prayers to heaven for all the errors of his life.

"I feel (said he) the cold powerful hand of death seizing on my heart:---but I have a few words to say to you, Sir, of the greatest importance.---In that (pointing to a small strong box which stood near his bed) are contained the writings of the estate of Ash-Park, which I have not mortgaged, and which I present to your excellent

* Alluding to the rencounter on Bagshot Heath, when he had carried off Miss Sidney.

lady.

lady.--Mrs. Sidney, her mother-in-law, died about six weeks since.--This act of restitution will, I hope, in some small degree, atone for my unworthy treatment of -----" Here, he fainted, through excess of weakness.--We attempted to give him a spoonful of a cordial mixture.--His poor wife affected me much: she gazed on his pale countenance, and meagre features, with unutterable anguish, while the big tears dropped on her breast.--Her trembling hands wiped the cold dew from his livid cheeks;--her arms rested his dying head on her bosom.--He once more opened his dim eyes, and fixing them on his afflicted wife,--"Molly--I am

196 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
just going---where is poor little Billy?
---Receive, my dear wife, a dying
kiss."

Perceiving he was perfectly sensible,
I kneeled by him, and with the most
solemn energy, read over him that most
excellent prayer appointed in our li-
turgy for the hour of departure.---I
added, also, some emphatic ejaculations
of my own, on the awful occasion.---
He shook his head.---" May (I said)
Our Saviour's blood atone and expiate."
---In feeble accents he endeavoured to
repeat the Lord's prayer;---then trying
to exert his last effort of strength, he
made a sign to be raised higher in his
bed:

bed :---he pointed to his child :---it was raised to his lips :--he attempted a feeble kiss :—and could only utter just articulate,—“ Both—wife and child—left to misery and poverty.”—“ that, said I, I will prevent by an annual support, and the little boy’s education shall be carefully attended to.”—The poor wretch fixed his dying eyes upon me—and with a look of seeming gratitude (which I shall never forget) endeavoured to thank me, but expired that moment in my arms, as I attempted to raise him.—The wretched wife gave a shriek, and was carried out of the room. I stood for some moments gazing on the awful scene before me :—Ah ! my

198 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

Lucy, what a preacher is death!—and how full, how pregnant of reflection was the breathless form before my eyes! I secretly exclaimed, “Come ye sons of riot and dissipation,—look here and tremble! Poor, deceived votaries of guilt and folly, my heart bleeds for you!—See here, the fatal end of guilt and shame!—See, in this wretched object, the sad consequence of vice and debauchery!—Where are now his pleasures? his wine, his women?—Where the gay companions of his idle hours? Ah, whither now are fled his gay-spent festive nights?—Alas! “the worm shall feed sweetly on him;—darkness shall cover his face.”—Let the gay, cruel, fluttering

flattering libertine, whose chief glory it is to deride his heavenly maker, look here and tremble:—Let the guardians of youth be particularly careful of the *company* to which they introduce their charge:—this poor young man is a pathetic example of being early seduced in life, by vicious companions. —What a melancholy spectacle!—a young man cut off by his own horrid vices, in the very prime of manhood! —his age barely twenty-six:—his person remarkably fine and amiable; with an understanding (had it not been perverted by wickedness) capable of the greatest improvements.—Alas!—my heart bleeds for him! early initiated

200 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
into every fashionable vice, with the
strongest propensities for, what the world
falsely calls, *pleasure*, he became at last
to even glory in those horrid crimes
which are a disgrace to human nature.
—Join, my Lucy—join in beseeching
eternal mercy, to receive his soul.—Let
not your spotless purity, your angelic
innocence, disdain to plead for the guilt-
y wretch, before he is consigned to
everlasting misery.

After having given orders, to the
keeper, for the body to be *decently* in-
terred in St. Sepulchre's church, and
discharged what had been expended in
this unhappy man's illness, I left these
horrid

horrid scenes of misery.—My heart, methought, as I passed by the melancholy receptacles of condemned wretches, even bled with pity, and awakened the “*very virtue of compassion*” in my breast.

As I passed by mouldy walls, and through the noisome avenues which lead to these scenes of horror, reflection was excited. Farewell, ye wretched inhabitants! I mentally said;—dreadful as your situation is, it is *guilt* alone which renders it so.—The dark cell, the iron fetters, the mouldy, noisome wall, would (were you *innocent*) lose their horrors:—you would then sleep as sweetly on your beds of straw, whilst

202 THE WEDDING RING; or,
angels guarded your peaceful slumbers,
as on beds of down in gilded palaces.

On issuing from this melancholy
abode, and on once more revisiting the
realms of chearful day, I ordered to be
instantly drove to the house of the apo-
thecary who attended the unhappy man,
as I was informed he was his relation.

---I found him at home, and he ac-
quainted me with some affecting parti-
culars relative to the poor Mrs. O'Neale.

--She was, he said, the daughter of a
worthy clergyman, in the north of Ire-
land, and has been really married to
the unhappy man; that she had dis-
obliged all her relations by her impru-
dent

dent marriage; and that she had been some time reduced to great poverty; and that he (the apothecary) had sent for her to England.---He also told me she was then in his house, and begged I would see her to satisfy myself of the above particulars: but this request I did not comply with, fearing my presence would only more distress her wounded mind.---One can never, my Lucy, be too delicate in our manner of relieving the wretched. I left fifty pounds in the hands of this worthy apothecary, and his wife, for the immediate relief of the poor widow; which sum I shall annually transmit to her, besides providing for her infant-son, and

202 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
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as on beds of down in gilded palaces.

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preserving his youth from the snares and vices which have proved so fatal to his unhappy father. I hurried home as fast as possible; but the melancholy scene I had so lately been witness to, in the dismal mansions of Newgate, entirely engrossed my thoughts.----To a mind so contemplative as mine, every object is a subject for *moralizing*;----but this was particularly so.---I found on my table a card from Lord B—— to dine, and accompany him to the new opera:---but I declined both.---I found my mind so much unhinged, my spirits so much affected, with the shocking exit of the unhappy O'Neale, and with deeply reflecting on the sad fate
of

of those poor wretches in the dreadful abodes of a loathsome gaol, that I preferred a solitary hour of meditation, in which I might indulge (if I may so call it) the *luxury of compassion*, to the most elegant, splendid feast, or to a crowded theatre, blazing with a thousand lights.

Ruminating on the melancholy fate of my unhappy fellow creatures, pining in want, and shut from the wholesome air, and society, I could not help applying these admirable lines of your favourite Thomson.

“ Ah?

106 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

“ Ah! little think the gay licentious proud,

“ Whom pleasure, power, and affluence sur-
“ round ;

“ They, who their thoughtless hours in giddy
“ mirth,

“ And wanton, often cruel, riot waste ;

“ Ah! little think they, while they dance
“ along,

“ How many feel, this very moment, death,

“ And all the sad variety of pain.

—————“ Thought fond man of these,

“ Vice in his high career would stand appall’d,

“ And heedless rambling impulse learn to
“ think :

“ The conscious heart of charity would warm,

“ And her wide wish benevolence dilate ;

“ The social tear would rise, the social sigh ;

“ And into clear perfection, gradual bliss,

“ Refining still, the social passions work.”

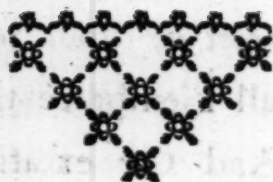
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In the evening, however, of this gloomy day, my spirits were greatly relieved by an unexpected letter from my excellent friend Stanley: the contents of which will equally rejoice my dearest Lucy.---It is, that our beloved friends are setting out immediately for England.---I see, methinks, the tear of joy *glisten* in the eye of my sweet love. Yes, you will once more fold your faithful Harriet to your fond bosom! ---Again shall I embrace the worthiest of men!---And O! extatic thought! before to-morrow evening, I hope to lose every care, to dissipate every gloomy thought, in the arms of my *adored wife*. Till that happy moment

208 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
ment arrives, and ever, believe me
your most

Tenderly affectionate,

H. H. B.



Lady

Lady BEAUMONT in Continuation.

YOU have read, my Harriet, the
 above affecting letter : --- was
 there ever *such* a man as has fallen to
 my lot ? --- and O transporting tidings !
 the *friend* of my heart too will soon (if
 it *can* admit of any increase) add to my
 happiness. In this sweet hope --- but I
 am interrupted for this evening.



I once more take up my willing pen.
 ----I was prevented last night from
 closing

210 THE WEDDING RING, OR,

closing a correspondence which nothing (while life continued) but the expected happiness of seeing my Harriet very soon, could ever have brought about :—a correspondence which has soothed my anxious mind in all its anguish and distress :—and which has convinced me, that a *real* friend, is “the medicine of life.”—And, oh ! my Harriet, when I look back on the sad late scenes of poverty and terrors, with every other distress I have encountered, and compare them with my unlooked-for deliverance, and now blissful state, I can never enough adore the Father of divine mercies. Surely, my *eventful* history would furnish no unuseful moral !

I have

I have been shedding a tear to the memory of my poor imprudent mother-in-law;—victim to credulity, and too easy faith, those fatal rocks on which the happiness of so many women are shipwrecked. Rowe makes his Calista speak a most affecting truth on this subject. Being asked by her fond father, “Why she turned to folly!”—She answers in the most pathetic manner, “It was, because I loved, and was a woman;—the *idle void*,” her heart, she says, “made up of easy faith, and fond belief.”—Far be it from me, my friend, to depreciate the character of Mrs. Sidney, the woman of whom my worthy father made choice, therefore intitled

tled to my respect. Her conduct was a fatal truth, which may be applied to much the greater part of our *believing* sex.

The poor wicked O'Neale!—May heaven extend its mercy!—Care, *early* care, shall be taken of the morals of the little helpless wretch he has left behind him.—But see down the winding avenue, cut through yonder sloping hill, is the chariot of my beloved Harley! Transporting sight!—O, my friend, “the joys of meeting pay the pangs of absence, else who could bear it?”—this truth I shall fully experience, when I fold to my beating heart, my dearest

Henry.

Henry ;—and my much-loved, faithful Harriet.—Accept a thousand wishes for your safe arrival.—Remember, you and your worthy partner are to make Harley House your abode for the first three months.—But, hark ! I hear the welcome sound of the chariot wheels of my beloved husband ! my heart flutters with delight, and seems bursting from its frail dwelling, to fly to meet him.—He approaches :—he looks up at my windows :—he smiles :—he waves his hand :—I come—I come my dearest love !—I must throw aside my pen, and fly down to meet him this moment :—not another word more can I add (nor in *such* a situation can you *expect* I should)

214 THE WEDDING RING; OR,

should) after I have assured my excellent friend,

I am ever her most sincere,

And tenderly affectionate,

LUCY BEAUMONT.



CON.

C O N C L U S I O N.

With a few moral Reflections on the preceding Characters.

HAVING brought our fair heroine to the summit of all *earthly* happiness, the reward of her admirable virtues, it is hoped her severe trials—her patience—industry—perseverance—and above all, her absolute trust in, and resignation to the Almighty disposer of all human events, may be a lesson of *instruction*, as well as *imitation*, to all young

216 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
young persons in distress, and that they
may engrave this maxim on their
hearts—.

“ Let never those despair, who trust in Vir-
“ tue.”

The most strict adherence to plain
truth is strongly recommended to the
young and unwary, as even the excel-
lent Miss Sidney's little deceit in passing
for a married woman (though, as she
thought, calculated for the best pur-
pose for her safety) the reader may ob-
serve, was a source of numberless dif-
ficulties and perplexities, and led her
into a labyrinth of misery. And as
strongly

strongly recommended it is, to beware of forming conjectures (however unfavourable appearances may be) of the conduct or character of any person whatever: as we see the tormenting doubts, and grievous perplexities, which harassed the mind of the worthiest of men, Mr. Harley, arose (all excellent as he was in every other respects) from a too *hasty* judgment of *appearances*.

In the wretched O'Neale, we may see the fatal effects of a neglected, a *fashionable* education; and be convinced that *vice*, and *guilt*, must infallibly end in *misery*.

His wicked associate, M'Daniel, came to an untimely and disgraceful end, the preceding year, for a highway robbery; and his other companions in infamy shared the like fate, for crimes of the same nature.

In the credulous Mrs. Sidney, we see the unhappy example of *wedding a title*, and of sacrificing reputation, ease, and fortune, merely to please the *eye*. — Unhappy sex! undone, most commonly, through *pride*, or *weakness*!

The poor young widow O'Neal was decently provided for, by the unbounded generosity of the beneficent Sir Harry Beau-

mont, the *friend of mankind*, whose charities were not confined to merely those he was particularly *known* to, but the *stranger*, the *widow*, and the *fatherless* were sufficiently entitled to his bounty, to need any other recommendation than their own distress.

The compassionate reader, who, perhaps, gave a sigh to the heart-felt distresses of the good Mr. Wilson (the worthy clergyman, who had been a passenger in the same coach with Miss Sidney) may now have the pleasure of being informed, that his lovely daughter perfectly recovered her reason, and her health, by the happy arrival of her

220 THE WEDDING RING; OR,
amiable lover, who on the death of his
father, immediately married her, and
purchased a seat very near that of Sir
Harry Beaumont, who presented her
worthy father with a living of four hun-
dred a year.

The excellent lady Beaumont did
not forget, in her splendid situation,
those worthy people Mrs. Smith, and
Mrs. Johnson, who were peculiarly
kind to her during her poverty and dis-
tress. Even the poor boy, Tommy, at
the cottage on Bagshot Heath, who, to
this day she acknowledges, was the lit-
tle preserver of her life when nearly
perishing with hunger in her then mi-
serable

ferable condition, she has taken into her own house, and most amply provided for him, as well as for the little O'Neale.

The worthy Mr. Stanley, and his amiable wife, are in possession of a noble seat within a mile of Harley House.—The improvement of his gardens and park (because it should afford bread to the industrious labourer) is as much admired by all people of taste, as the beautiful grotto is (the entire work of Mrs. Stanley's hands) under the craggy cliff of a hanging rock. Imagination cannot form a more lovely sight than Mr. Stanley and his admir-

able friend, with their beautiful wives, and numerous offspring, a little shining troop of boys and girls, playing round them, enjoying the balmy evening breeze in sweet Ash Park—

“Where woodbines flaunt, and roses shed a
“couch.”

Or, whilst they gain the lofty summit in the more polished scenes of Harley Grove, (the fragrance of the blooming beans, excelling all the perfumes of Arabia) the enraptured husbands, “each with his blooming beauty by his side,”

“In

" In various converse, softening every theme,
 " They, frequent-pausing turn, and from their
 " eyes,
 " Where meeken'd sense, and amiable grace,
 " And lively sweetness dwell, enraptur'd drink
 " That nameless spirit of ethereal joy,
 " Unutterable happiness! which love
 " Alone, bestows, and on a favour'd few."

The lovely Lady Beaumont, and the
 equally amiable Mrs. Stanley, are the
 most shining patterns of every virtue
 which can adorn, or exalt human na-
 ture. The refined pen of a Lyttleton,
 could only in these beautiful lines of
 his, do justice to their merit.

" Made to engage all hearts, and charm all

" eyes,

" Tho' meek, magnanimous; tho' witty, wife;

" Polite, as all their life, in courts had been,

" Yet *good*, as they the world had never seen :—

" Their minds are *Virtue*, by the *Graces*,

" dress."

To the most delicate taste for the polite arts, these accomplished women know, perfectly, how to blend the *useful* qualities, with the most *elegant*. The domestic wife, the fond mother, the tender nurse, are characters in which they eminently shine. Can imagination form a more pleasing view, than the
beau-

beautiful Lady Beaumont in her nursery, a lovely little infant smiling at her breast, with two young boys, blooming as angels, and a little prating girl playing round her knees, to each of whom the fond delighted mother turns her eye, glistening with the tear of maternal tendernefs?

“ While nothing strikes her eye, but sights of
“ blifs,

“ All various nature, *pressing* on the heart.”

She now strains her little infant to her tender bosom—the next minute adorns, with flowers, the hair of one

of her pretty prattlers, who is begging to be very fine;—whilst she is, at the same time, giving orders for a plate of strengthening food—for a bason of comfortable broth, to be sent to a poor sick family in the neighbouring cottage.

Or is it in the power of nature to exhibit a more delightful sight, than the equally amiable Mrs. Stanley, in the midst of youthful beauty, furrounded with her little ones, preparing with her own hands the healing medicine, or restoring cordial, for her poor neighbour? Or shall we follow her to the cold cheerless hut of poverty, in which (with her
little

little darling *Lucy* running by her side, for each has a child named after her beloved friend) she enters with the benignity of some pitying angel, and kneeling by the sordid bed of the poor emaciated day-labourer, with her lovely hands applies the healing plaister to the putrid sore, or binds the languid head of sickness—whilst, with the most soothing tenderness, she raises the drooping heart of deep distress?

Methinks I hear, on reading the above paragraph, that most *useless* and *contemptible* of all human beings (a modern fine lady) cry out, — “ Oh, shocking! — What an employment
“ for

“ for a beauty, to dress sores, and
 “ spread plaisters;—to visit a beggarly
 “ family in a poor solitary cottage!—
 “ Monstrous!—And how stupid for
 “ that fond fool, Lady Beaumont, to
 “ suckle her own children!—To be
 “ plagued with a squalling brat!—
 “ Deplorable!—To be married, is to
 “ be buried alive, in such a dismal
 “ state in the country.—Not one opera!
 “ not one dear rout!—O dreadful!”
 Lady Beaumont, and Mrs. Stanley,
 condemn such sentiments.

“ What is the world to them,
 “ Its pomp, its pleasure, and its nonsense
 “ all?”

—“ Devoting

—————“ Devoting all

“ To love, each is to each, a dearer self ;

“ Supremely happy in th’ awaken’d power

“ Of giving joy.”

The calm, rational delight, which Sir Harry Beaumont, his worthy friend, and their amiable consorts enjoy, is, in reality, a perfect image of the following beautiful picture of *virtuous* love, as described by Thomson.

“ An elegant sufficiency, content,

“ Retirement, rural quiet, friendship, books,

“ Ease and alternate labour, useful life,

“ Progressive virtue, and *approving* heaven.

“ These are the matchless joys of virtuous love ;

“ And thus their moments fly.——

“ When

230 THE WEDDING RING, &c.

“ When, after the long vernal day of life,
“ Enamour’d more as more remembrance swells,
“ With many a proof of recollected love,
“ Together down they sink in social sleep,
“ Together freed, their gentle spirits fly,
“ To scenes where love, and bliss, immortal
“ reign.”

F I N I S.



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117 (not fiction)
111 fiction

